'Talking Things'

Bridging Social Capital through Transformation Design

By

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Abstract

The importance of building *social capital*, particularly in urban neighbourhoods has been a topic of discussion for sociologists, political scientists and psychologists for some time now. This thesis addresses the issue through the lens of an emergent branch of design known as *Transformation Design*, which focuses on collaborative and multidisciplinary ways of creating a change in behavior through design.

Employing participatory methods and borrowing from theories of *narrative empathy* and *Thing theory*, this thesis describes a praxis centred around the design of an experience where the exchange of narratives around everyday objects of personal significance creates a dialogic learning experience that builds social capital.

The resulting project, *Talking Things,* is a toolkit that is intended to encourage dialogues amongst members at community centres and neighbourhood houses, but can be adapted and employed in other circumstances where the goal is to build a sense of belonging and community. The toolkit describes a workshop with step-by-step instructions to prompt and facilitate the exchange of narratives.

Though the primary objective is to engage people in an informal, collaborative learning experience, the stories can be recorded and have an online presence that sustains the conversations.

This thesis contributes to the growing discourse of the designer's role within a community, which stretches beyond the designing of places and things; and into an agent of change.

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Acknowledgments

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Dedication

To the two cities that I call Home.

Keywords

Culture:

For the purpose of this thesis I take the Barthesian view of *culture* as a 'way of everyday life'. I refer to *culture* as the ideological underpinnings that influence our thoughts and actions: the way in which we do what we do and think what we think.

Exchange of narratives:

For the purpose of this thesis I define an *exchange of narratives* as a dialogic means of sharing the knowledge of a lived experience in a manner that evokes an emotional engagement.

Home:

A *home* goes beyond the idea of a dwelling and encompasses memories, emotions, relationships and connections in addition to a physical structure. For this thesis and thesis project, the word *home* is deliberately left to the participant's interpretation to see what their definition of *home* is.

Narrative empathy:

Empathy is a response to the way one supposes another to feel in a particular situation.
Narrative empathy can be evoked during the act of reading or hearing a story as the narrative becomes a conduit for the audience to imagine what the character is feeling in a particular situation.

Sense of community:

I use the term a '*sense of community*' as proposed by psychologists McMillan and Chavis:

> Sense of community is a feeling that members (of a community) have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together. (Chavis, McMillan)

Social capital:

I use the explanation of *social capital* put forward by Robert Putnam. He describes *social capital* in its

simplest form; as the connectedness that results from building networks based on social norms and mutual trust, that people can draw upon to solve common problems and facilitate collective action within communities. He posits that although these networks have intrinsic value for those that form them, the ability of these networks to grow and initiate positive change within communities is indicative of the extrinsic value that they could also possess.

Thing theory:

This is a theory put forward by Bill Brown that lies within the realm of *material culture*. It deals with the subject/object dialogic that stems from the relationships between people and things.

Transformation Design:

Transformation Design is a human-centred, multidisciplinary process, which takes a systemic approach in addressing complex issues within organizations and communities. It is an evolution of *Service Design* based on a methodology that includes helping communities build up their own capacity for ongoing change. *Transformation Design* is rooted in collaborations that seek to create fundamental changes in behaviour within the organization/communities that they hope to transform. Although it stems from *Service Design*, the multidisciplinary approach of this emergent discipline culls from different design and non-design disciplines such as cognitive psychology, linguistics, architecture, haptics, ethnography, narrative theory and storytelling.

Wicked problems:

The term *wicked problem*, is often attributed to complex, contradictory, poorly-defined problems dealing with multiple stakeholders. Defined by Horst Rittel, these are a "class of social system problems which are ill-formulated, where the information is confusing, where there are many clients and decision makers with conflicting values, and where the ramifications in the whole system are thoroughly confusing."
(Rittel, qtd. in Buchanan, 1992, p. 97).

Introduction

"Every story is a travel story"

-Michel de Certeau

Karachi as a city, is passionate and full of contradictions. It clutches the dreams of 17 million people beneath a cloak of dusty despair; yet it is a resilient city that is constantly contorting itself to accommodate the intricacies of its past and the complexities of its present. I was born and raised there as part of a large Zoroastrian family and spent most of my life amidst a strange mix of cultural influences. I went to a private school with a strong colonial heritage; grew up singing more songs from Broadway than Bollywood; frequently travelled within Asia and the U.S. and celebrated everything from Easter to Eid, Christmas, Diwali and Navroze.

After moving to Vancouver in my mid-twenties, I found myself trying to reconcile the different facets of my life in Karachi through stories and anecdotes. Not only did these stories animate a place that most people only knew through the eyes of the media; the use of a personal narrative allowed my audience to draw parallels and distinctions between their experiences and mine. In most cases, these narratives sparked a dialogue that went beyond a means of knowledge sharing and became a way for me to connect with people, sometimes over shared circumstances, other times over shared feelings or interests.

As I began to identify a realm of research, I drew heavily on the idea of personal narratives as tools that explain, educate and evoke empathy while transmitting ideas.

Figure 0.1
*A dialogical
learning
experience
through the
exchange
of personal
narratives*
Zara N. Contractor

2
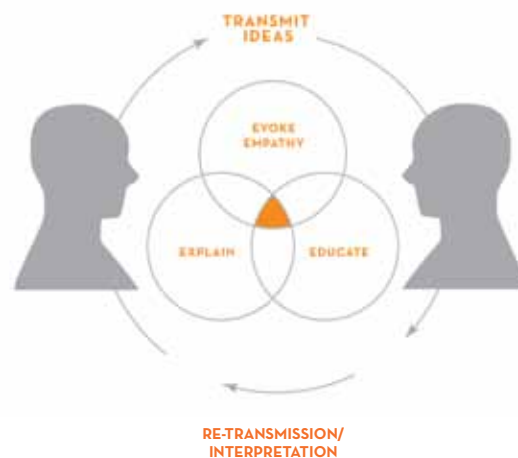
The act of sharing a personal story has always been an innate form of communication and self-expression for me; I hadn't imagined until then, that it could be a springboard from which to launch my thesis. To begin with, I delved into the history of narratives; creating an extensive taxonomy of methods and media. It didn't take long to realize that almost every act and/or instance of communication, no matter how routine, contains a narrative. It is the thread that ties together the cave paintings of Lascaux and a status update on Facebook or a piece of jewellery and the skyline of a city: each a testament to a lived experience. However, it was not what constitutes a narrative that I wanted to explore; it was the reciprocity within the act of story-sharing. This led me to the work of Paulo Freire and his concept of *dialogic learning*. Freire eloquently states that "dialogue is an act where humans meet to reflect on their reality, as they make and remake it": That is, by going through a process of vocalizing followed by collective reflection we first acknowledge the extent and limitations of our knowledge, and are then able to "act critically to transform reality" (Freire, Schor, 1987, p.11). I wanted to adopt this premise, but at the time I had no idea what it was that I wanted to transform.

For a while my interest in *narrative empathy* and *dialogic learning* ran parallel to another line of inquiry: As a thriving urban center, Vancouver's residents bring a diverse range of cultures to the neighbourhoods in which they settle. Here I refer to *culture* as Roland Barthes proposes, that is, as the ideological underpinnings that influence our thoughts and actions: the way in which we do what we do and think how we think (Barthes qtd. in Hebdige, 2012, p. 126). This view privileges personal experience rather than ethnicity when speaking of *culture*.

Despite the rich opportunity for *cross-cultural* exchange, Vancouverites grapple with a growing sense of detachment from each other and from the communities in which they live. In June 2012, the Vancouver Foundation published a report called 'Connections and Engagement' which highlighted the following issues:

> "What people said concerned them the most was a growing sense of isolation and disconnection. They said we live increasingly in silos, separated by ethnicity, culture, language, income, age and even geography. They lamented what they saw as a deepening civic malaise that has resulted in more people retreating from community activities. They said this corrosion of caring and social isolation hurts them personally and hurts their community. And they asked us a hard question: How can we begin

to tackle complex issues like poverty and homelessness if people are disconnected, isolated and indifferent? How can we make people care about community issues if their concern stops at their front yard?"

These findings confirmed what was discovered by Conscientious Innovation Ltd. in 2010 when they published The SHIFT Report ™ which identified the top sustainability issue felt by 87% of North Americans as the need to 'feel connected to family, friends, community' while 58% felt that 'being engaged and supporting the local community' was imperative to them.

The two lines of inquiry began to converge as I looked into the role that an *exchange of narratives* could play in community engagement within Vancouver's neighbourhoods. The first issue that I could identify was the need to build a stronger *sense of community*. I use this term as proposed by community psychologists McMillan and Chavis. Their definition encompasses the feelings of membership and inclusion associated with belonging to a network, shared emotional connections, the importance of each member to the group (and the group to each member) and the conviction that each member's needs will be met collectively by the group. If I were to use a metaphor, a *sense of community* would be akin to a trunk of a tree; unifying the various elements of the tree, while symbolizing an attachment to a particular place.
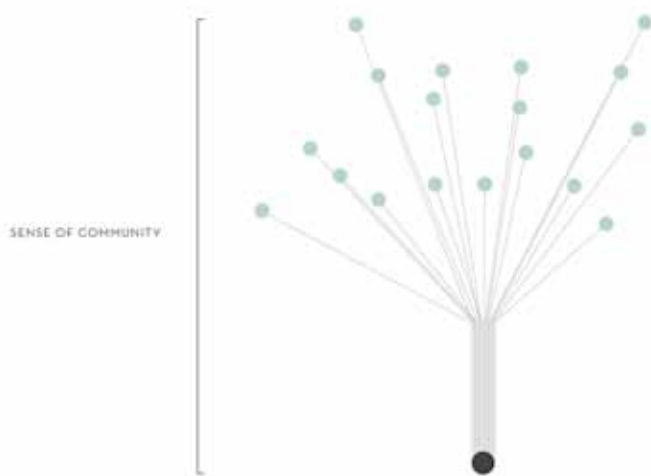
SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Figure 0.2
Sense of Community
Zara N. Contractor

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Figure 0.3
Social Capital
Zara N. Contractor

SOCIAL CAPITAL

ENSE OF COMMUNITY

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
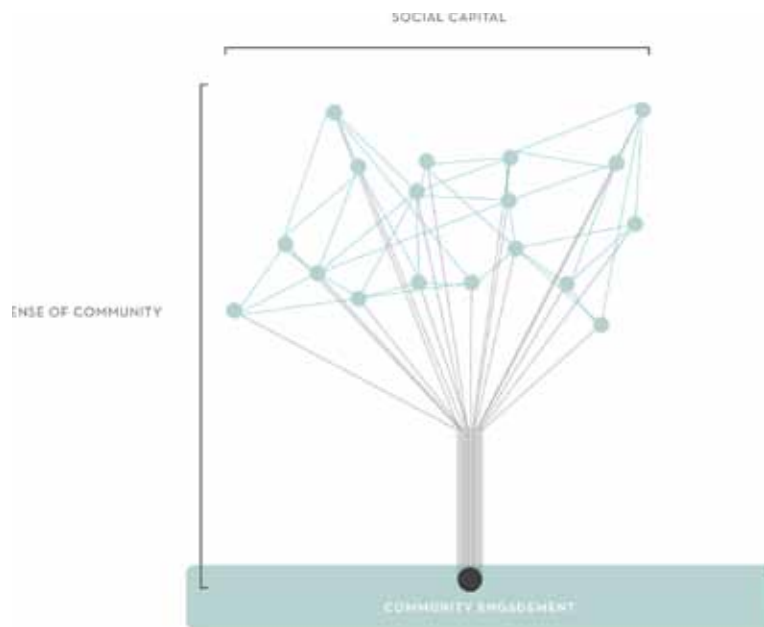
Figure 0.4
*How a Sense
of Community
relates to
Social Capital*
Zara N. Contractor

By contrast, *social capital* would refer to the canopy of the tree: the leaves, branches and limbs and other constituents that form a complex, growing system. Therefore while a *sense of community* speaks to the strength of an individual's ties to place/community, *social capital* speaks to the strength of the networks that people form within communities (Putnam, 2006). I will delve deeper into these constructs in the chapter on community concepts, however for now I would like to point out that these connections form the basis for community engagement within heterogeneous as well as homogeneous communities.

The issues of declining *social capital* and a weak *sense of community* prevalent in Vancouver can be described as a *wicked problem*, which, as defined by Horst Rittel, is a "class of social system

problems which are ill-formulated, where the information is confusing, where there are many clients and decision makers with conflicting values, and where the ramifications in the whole system are thoroughly confusing." (Rittel, qtd. in Buchanan, 1992). In addition to being ill-defined by nature, *wicked problems* often deal with incomplete or contradictory information and a set of requirements that is constantly changing. *Wicked problems* do not have a definitive solution but can be tackled in a variety of ways depending on the point of view one takes when approaching it (Buchanan, 1992). Nigel Cross has pointed to a designer's ability to recognize patterns and synthesize information, as well as their ability to think 'constructively' and in a 'solution-oriented' manner as some of the reasons that we are able to deal with such ill-defined (*wicked*) problems (Cross, 1982). The emerging discipline of *Transformation Design* similarly deals with designing "a means of continually responding, adapting and innovating" in response to *wicked problems*. This sub-set of design can be seen as an evolution of *Service Design*, which focuses on facilitating and catalysing change within communities (Sangiorgi, 2011, p. 1). *Transformation Design* strongly advocates collaborative, multi- disciplinary, capacity-building approaches that go beyond traditional solutions to problems (Cottam et al., 2006). It is through this lens that I view the problem of community engagement and question if a methodology rooted in the theories of *narrative empathy* and *dialogic learning* can increase the *social capital* in urban neighbourhoods, while building a stronger *sense of community*.

The first step toward developing a nontraditional approach to this problem was to see what currently existed in the realm of community engagement and storytelling. I attended a number of events that related to these fields and began an iterative process of conducting workshops relating to storytelling. I describe these in detail in appendix 1 and 2, respectively. I also looked to the growing pool of designers who are committed to ethical, sustainable design that benefits people and engages the communities that they live in. My thesis presents itself as a toolkit that is intended for the use of those working within the fields of community development and engagement, however it may also be applied wherever a deeper sense of engagement is desired within a short span of time. Through the course of this thesis essay, each component of the toolkit and the design decisions leading up to them are discussed in detail, along with the theories and themes that are seminal to my praxis.

Different facets of community engagement and notions of *space/place* are introduced as they relate to the thesis project, *Talking Things*. These concepts are overlaid with theories of *narrative empathy*, *dialogic learning* and the role of objects in drawing out narratives, with particular emphasis on Bill Brown's *thing theory* and Sherry Turkle's work on *Evocative Objects*. The design decisions made throughout the process as well as the methodology used are discussed in detail. The project is also grounded in design theories and practice and discusses the role of the designer in society. However, before I delve into the various elements of the thesis project, I would first like to explore the current landscape of design.

Chapter 1
The Changing Landscape of Design

Towards a Greater Good

There is a moment when astronauts observe the earth from space and see it in its entirety: Sans borders they are able to grasp the inter-connectivity of life on our planet; and how each tiny part of the world, irrespective of how isolated it may seem from the ground, is in fact an organ of this living, breathing planet that we all call home. (The planetary collective, 2011).

When taking an ecological perspective, we are forced to acknowledge a much larger system in which we each play a part and bear a responsibility. Designer and author, Victor Papanek's scathing comment springs to mind, in which he states that "there are professions more harmful than...design, but only a very few of them" (Papanek, 2005, p. ix). In *Design for the Real World,* Papanek pointed to how a lack of accountability on the part of designers contributes towards an unsustainable, consumerist culture that affects the planet and every one of us living on it. His seminal book is seen by many as having laid the groundwork for a discipline that advocates designing products and services that are sustainable, egalitarian and ethical in their approach. Joined by voices such as Herbert Simon, John Thackara, Buckminster Fuller and Bruce Mau, a movement has developed that champions the cause of '*Design for Social Good'* (Chochinov, qtd. in Pilloton, 2009, p. 6) by recognizing a designer's capacity to contribute creative, human-centred solutions to societal issues in addition to their often unrecognized position in shaping culture (Fuad-Luke, 2009). Such rhetoric is being systematically ingrained into contemporary design praxis, perhaps catalysed by the universal urgency to address complex social and environmental issues.

Chochinov posits that in this way design joins a nameless, decentralized, worldwide movement that Paul Hawkens has dubbed the *Blessed Unrest* in which individuals and collectives work separately, but with the common purpose of "creating meaningful change at every level" (Chochinov, qtd. in Pilloton, 2009, p. 9). It is this idea of fundamental change which prompted Alastair Fuad-Luke to coin the phrase '*Design Activism';* a call to action for designers dealing with social change. In a book by the same name, that further describes the term, Fuad-Luke demonstrates how different aspects of design may be used "to elicit social, cultural and/or political transformations" (Fuad-Luke, 2009, p. 6).

A point to note here is that despite the altruistic tone of this discourse, design for social impact is still part of an economic model, albeit one that expands the bottom line to accommodate people and the planet in addition to profit: that is, the triple bottom line. Examples of this are the design-led initiatives *IDEO, ProjectHDesign* and *DESIS* that are by no means acts of charity (Pilloton, 2009) but which have piqued the interest of the corporate as well as the non-profit sector, paving the way for socially responsible design.

This is concurrent to the scenario presented by American author Daniel Pink in his book *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-brainers Will Rule the Future,* in which he points toan imminent change in how global businesses will be run. Pink observes that "professional success and personal satisfaction" lie in the hands of those who privilege thinking with the right hemisphere of their brains which is the hemisphere that approaches problems in a "nonlinear, holistic and intuitive" way (Pink, 2006, p. 2). He speaks of six basic 'aptitudes' or *'six senses'* which I will elaborate on in chapter 8.

Co-Design & Transformation within Design's New Landscapes

"Designers will be in demand
as the usefulness of design thinking
is acknowledged in mankind's drive
to address the challenges
of global, systemic issues"

-Sanders and Stappers

In the above mentioned paper (Sanders et al., 2008, p. 12), Sanders describes a rich and limitless terrain that is in a constant state of regeneration. It is a field that is no longer limited to those who have been formally trained as designers, but is one that has opened itself up to the cross-pollination of ideas from different disciplines and areas of expertise.

The collaborative nature of co-creation and co-design relinquishes the 'expert mindset' in favour of a process through which the end users are given a voice during the design process and so form an integral part of the creation. Co-design also specifically allows for collaboration between designers and non-designers to create a product or service, opening up endless possibilities for hybrid forms of design to exist. I will explain this in detail within the section on Collaboration, Co-creation and Enabling Platforms, but first let us consider the other scenario. This paints a picture in which design is a mindset that can be adopted by anyone; whether formally trained in design or not.

Although this democratic view of design was posited as early as the 1960 and 70s by design thinkers such as Victor Papanek and Herbert Simon who wrote that "everyone designs who devises courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones" (qtd. in Fuad-Luke, 2009).

One could argue that only as recently as 2004 when Hilary Cottam (a social entrepreneur with no

academic background in design) was chosen to lead a team created by The Design Council to apply design thinking to transform public services—and was subsequently named as UK Designer of the Year in 2005—was design truly recognized as a thought process as much as a skill. Through her systemic approach to *wicked problems* such as the UK's education, health and prison systems, Cottam and her team revolutionized *Service Design* by creating a methodology that included helping communities build up their own capacity for ongoing change. With that critical change, a new discipline emerged, which they aptly named *Transformation Design.*

The methodology that Cottam et al. created has 5 other components in addition to the one mentioned. To begin with, designers must take part in defining and redefining the brief. Involving designers at the pre-design stage allows them to use systems thinking to identify possible areas of intervention.

After that the design team is able to construct a framework built upon collaboration that employs participatory design techniques, allowing for a range of expertise to be applied to the *wicked problem* that they must tackle. Then, there is an emphasis within *Transformation Design* to focus on behaviour change rather than offering superficial design solutions, which is often done by turning to nontraditional design methods. The last tenet is to create fundamental change, by initiating projects that are part of a larger cycle of transformation.

In her paper *Transformation Services and Transformation Design,* Daniela Sangirogi points to 7 more *Transformation Design* principals. The first principal, *active citizens* speaks to collaborating with users and stakeholders using participatory design techniques. The second points to keeping the scope of the project manageable through interventions on a community scale. These two points form the core. The other five principles (namely: building capacities and research partnerships; re-distributing power; enhancing imagination and hope; building infrastructures and enabling platforms and evaluating success and impact) orbit around the two core tenets.

My praxis borrows heavily from the principles of transformation design as laid out by Cottam et al. and Sangiorgi. Rooted in behaviour change brought about by bridging social capital and building a sense of community, I use nontraditional design methods in *Talking Things,* by eliciting narrative empathy through dialogic learning and storytelling. As with *Transformation Design,* my approach is multidisciplinary; combining elements of community engagement, theories of *narrative empathy, dialogic learning* and *material culture.* It also builds capacity by opening up platforms for

dialogue amongst members of a community which is the first step towards; enabling and empowering them to collaborate on future community-based initiatives. Most importantly, however, it relies on collaboration and co-creation as a result of participatory design.
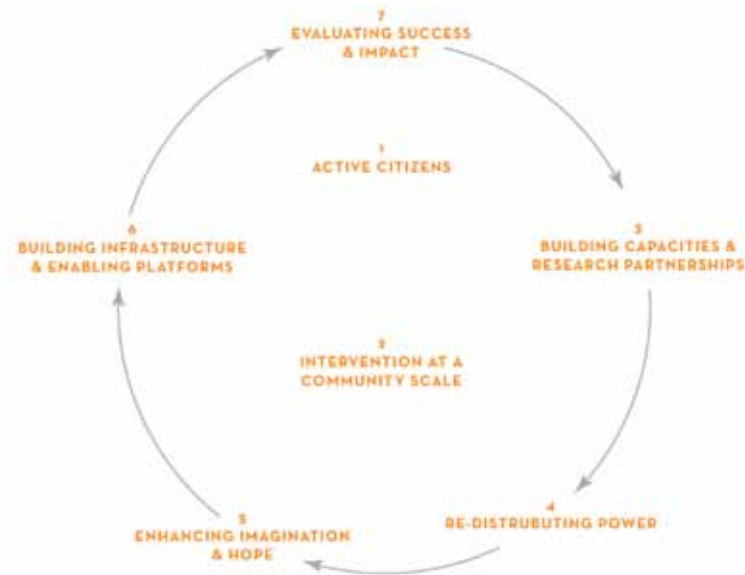
Figure 1.1
Transformational Principles Adapted from Daniella Sangiorgi
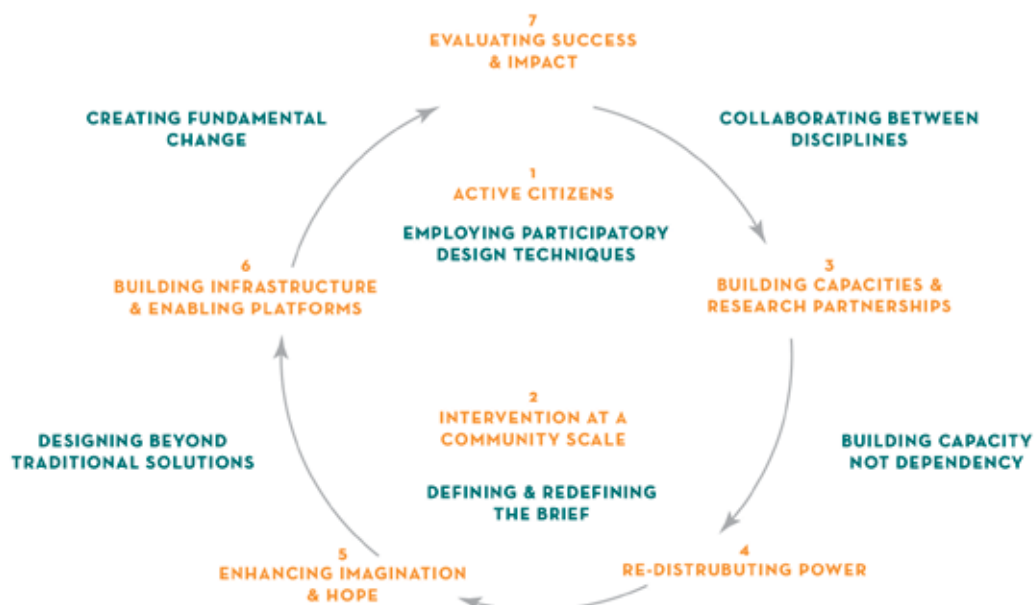
Figure 1.2
Transformational Principles by Sangiorgi overlaid with the principles by Cottam et al. Zara N. Contractor

Collaboration, Co-creation and Enabling Platforms

Writer and systems thinker Margaret Wheatley, is famous for her role in creating the *World Café*, which champions the idea of change coming from within communities and not as an external imposition. The *World Café* is system of problem solving dialogues based on 7 design principles, including setting the context of the dialogue, creating a hospitable space, exploring questions that matter, encouraging participation, connecting diverse perspectives, collectively listening for pattern and themes and lastly, sharing collective discoveries. (World Cafe Design Principles, n.d.). Wheatley talks of the collective wisdom available within communities as a powerful resource privileging teamwork and a collaborative learning environment.

Within the design sphere, Liz Sanders is a long-standing advocate of using co-creation methods that are catered to reveal the tacit knowledge of users, in order to inform the design process. She defines co-creation as "an act of collective creativity" where the eventual user of the service or product takes on an active role in the design processes of "knowledge development, idea generation and concept development" as "an expert of their experience" (Sanders and Stappers, 2012, p. 24/25). Unlike traditional design models where researchers equipped with relevant theories, observed a passive user and passed on their findings to a designer; co-design and co-creation models are based on creating a synergy between the designer, the researcher and the user, so that each of them can contribute their skills and knowledge over the course of the design development process. The figure below shows the various stages of a design process: Co-creation as shown by the orange dots, may take place at any or all stages.

| PRE-DESIGN | DISCOVER | DESIGN | MAKE | MARTKET + SELL | AFTER SALES |
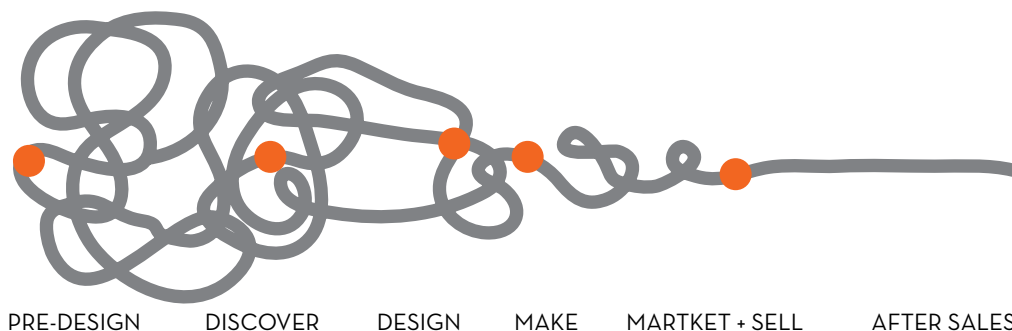
Figure 1.3
Phases in the design process Adapted from Sanders & Stappers

Generative design research focuses on the front end of the design development process and deals with co-designing and co-creating (Sanders and Stappers, 2012,p.25). Sanders, a design expert who has developed a prolific body of work dealing with co-creation and co-design recognizes that in most cases it is not enough to invite the user to join the conversation: it is almost always necessary to equip them with the right tools for them to participate in the process. "Generative design research gives people a language with which they can imagine and express their ideas and dreams for future experience" (Sanders and Stapper. 2012, p. 7).

I have taken cues for *Talking Things* from generative design research in that it provides the tools through which participants can express themselves and are guided through a step-by-step process to enable them to build a *sense of community* and strengthen their ties to each other. The next chapter looks at *Talking Things* in the context of precedents of toolkits within the design world.

Chapter 2
Convivial Tools and Toolkits

Concurrent to this shift towards socially responsible design, is the emergence of enabling tools, which Ivan Illich dubbed as *tools for conviviality*. According to Illich *convivial tools* are the opposite of industrial tools. Although both are "manmade consequences of design and development processes" Illich describes *convivial tool*s as "those which give each person who uses them the greatest opportunity to enrich the environment with the fruits of his or her vision". (Illich qtd. in Sanders and Stappers, 2012, pg. 7). Despite Illich's call to action in 1973, the development of *convivial tools* is still an emergent concept in action design research. As I looked for existing precedents within the world of design, I came across a number of toolkits, the most notable of which were IDEO's Human-Centred Design (HCD) Toolkit, Dan Lockton's Design with Intent Toolkit, Frog's Collective Action toolkit and Elizabeth Sanders prolific work under the banner of MakeTools. Each toolkit targets a particular user group or is meant for a specific scenario of use.

IDEO has developed a number of toolkits, some of which are client based and others which are open source and may be downloaded and used via their website. One of their most widely used toolkits is the HCD toolkit; an open-source set of tools "designed specifically for people, nonprofits, and social enterprises that work with low-income communities throughout the world". The toolkit first introduces the concept and benefits of HCD and then the phases and processes involved. Using a clever play on words, the toolkit is divided into three phases: *Hear, Create* and *Deliver*, each of which contains several steps that walk the user through the process of designing.

Figure 2.1 *The HCD Toolkit in use* From http://www.hcdconnect.org/toolkit/en

The Hear stage is when designers gain a deeper understanding of the communities they are serving. This may be through observation and/or storytelling methods. The underlying mindset is one where designers acknowledge the importance of tacit knowledge within members of a community and respect that trust-building exercises must be conducted in order for the community members to share this knowledge.

The Create phase outlines co-design and empathetic design as two design methods that can be used to identify opportunities and create frameworks for solutions. Traditional design methods such as rapid prototyping are suggested with an emphasis on participant feedback.

The last phase of the toolkit is *Deliver*. This phase largely deals with installation/implementation and assessment. It allows for mini-pilot tests and several iterations and is geared towards sustainable outcomes.

The toolkit includes a detailed user guide that outlines each of these components, a chapter on best practices and scenarios of use and a separate field guide containing worksheets, presumably to allow for ease of use in the field where the rest of the 200 page toolkit may be redundant. The HCD Toolkit is aesthetically pleasing and easily navigable; a positive departure from the standard toolkits employed by NGOs. The layout is simple and uncluttered. Minimalist icons, a sans serif typeface and the liberal use of negative space keep the dense material from becoming too overwhelming, whereas the vivid imagery evokes empathy while illustrating scenarios of use.

In addition to the HCD toolkit IDEO has developed *Method Cards* for designers which features different design thinking tools and exercises that can be done as a group or individually and even a toolkit for non-designers aimed at re-imagining classrooms in the 21st century called *Design Thinking for Educators,* which empowers non-designers to develop creative problem-solving skills which can be applied in a specific circumstance. Once again this toolkit divides the process into 5 phases and is rich in diagrams, easy to work with and effectively uses icons and imagery to convey each message.
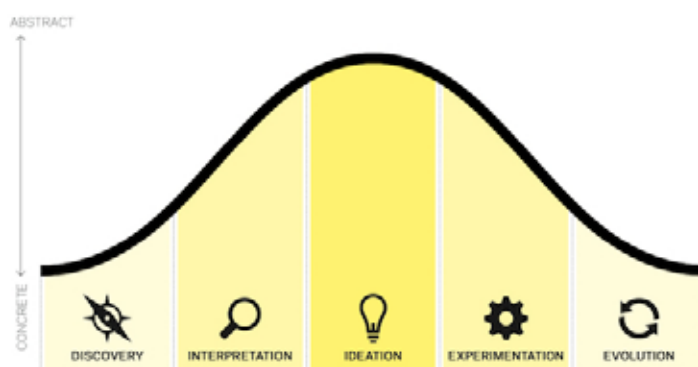

Figure 2.2 *A diagram of the phases in the Design Thinking for Educators toolkit* From http://www.hcdconnect.org/toolkit/en

The *Design with Intent* toolkit is meant to equip designers with a brainstorming tool and guide to prompt a change in behaviour through design. Unlike the HCD toolkit it is not divided into phases and there is no hierarchy; just a smorgasbord of design options. The toolkit takes the form of 101 cards that are nested under 8 lenses: the architectural lens, the error-proofing lens, the ludic lens, the Machiavellian lens, the cognitive lens, the perceptual lens, the interaction lens and the security lens. The 8 lenses provide a philosophical approach to *Persuasive Design* inspired across a range of disciplines.

Architectural
Angles | Converging & diverging | Conveyor belts | Feature deletion | Hiding things | Material properties | Mazes | Pave the cowpaths | Positioning | Roadblock | Segmentation & spacing | Simplicity

Errorproofing
Are you sure? | Choice editing | Conditional warnings | Defaults | Did you mean? | Interlock | Matched affordances | Opt-outs | Portions | Task lock-in/out

Interaction
Feedback through form | Kairos | Partial completion | Peer feedback | Progress bar | Real-time feedback | Simulation & feedforward | Summary feedback | Tailoring | Tunnelling & wizards

Ludic
Challenges & targets | Collections | Leave gaps to fill | Levels | Make it a meme | Playfulness | Rewards | Role-playing | Scores | Storytelling | Unpredictable reinforcement

Perceptual
(A)symmetry | Colour associations | Contrast | Fake affordances | Implied sequences | Metaphors | Mimicry & mirroring | Mood | Nakedness | Perceived affordances | Possibility trees | Prominence | Proximity & grouping | Seductive atmospherics | Similarity | Transparency | Watermarking

Cognitive
Assuaging guilt | Commitment & consistency | Decoys | Desire for order | Do as you're told | Emotional engagement | Expert choice | Framing | Habits | Personality | Provoke empathy | Reciprocation | Rephrasing & renaming | Scarcity | Social proof

Machiavellian
Anchoring | Antifeatures & crippleware | Bundling | Degrading performance | First one free | Forced dichotomy | Format lock-in/out | Functional obsolescence | I cut, you choose | Poison pill | Serving suggestion | Slow/no response | Style obsolescence | Worry resolution

Security
Coercive atmospherics | Peerveillance | Sousveillance | Surveillance | Threat of injury | Threat to property | What you can do | What you have | What you know | What you've done | Where you are | Who or what you are

Figure 2.3 *The eight lenses of the Design with Intent toolkit, and their subcategories*
From http://www.danlockton.com/dwi/Main_Page

The *architectural lens* borrows from architecture and urban planning; the error-proofing lens is based on health & safety-related design which often cannot allow for trial and error in its design. The *ludic lens* on the other hand, takes from social psychology to prompt a desired behaviour using playfulness and engagement, whereas the *Machiavellian lens* is loosely based on game theory to trick consumers into the desired behaviour. The *cognitive lens* is based on behavioural economics and cognitive psychology with regards to decision-making. The *perceptual lens* takes from "product semantics, semiotics, ecological psychology and Gestalt psychology" (Lockton, 2010) based on the perception of patterns that may be detected by all 5 senses. The *interaction lens* borrows from Human-Computer Interaction and Persuasive Technology and finally, the *security lens* takes inspiration from different applications that discourage certain behaviour.

In the first edition of the toolkit, the behaviour change sought was accompanied by one or two of three icons indicating different types of behaviour change.

The first type of behaviour change was *motivating,* that is, by incentivising desired behaviour or making it more appealing—as Lockton describes through the interaction lens, this may be achieved through a progress bar or real-time feedback. On the other hand the design could be *enabling,* in which case the preferred action is easier to perform than the less desirable action, for example, the perceptual lens points to prominence and visibility as one way of enabling behaviour. The third case would be constricting behaviour by blocking certain options. In this case the security lens which describes the use of a height barrier to restrict vehicles is an apt example.

Each of the 101 cards contains a title, a prompt or question, a visual example and the category or lens that the prompt belongs to. There are three options available and these depend on individual or group usage. In the first instance, separate cards provide introductions to each of the 8 categories the small scale of the cards is most conducive for individual work. Lockton suggests picking cards at random, pairing different cards up and/or choosing individual cards to help guide the design process. In the second case, each lens with the relevant sub-categories and prompts can be downloaded and printed on an A3 sized paper and in the third option, all 101 cards and their respective lenses may be bought as a poster. The cards have several layers of information and though they do not have the visual simplicity of the IDEO cards, the prompts, questions and images are evocative in communicating the message. Taking relatable, real-world examples makes them even more effective.

Figure 2.4 *Components of the Design with Intent card*
Adapted from http://requisitevariety.co.uk/design-with-intent-toolkit/

IDEO's HCD toolkit and Lockton's Design with Intent toolkit add to the growing number of resources that aid the design process, Frog's Collective Action Toolkit (*CAT*) breaks from this and instead enables members of a community to clarify and realize the goals that they have—as the name suggests—through collective action. Like IDEO's toolkit, the *CAT* divides the design process into distinct phases or *activity areas*, however in this case, one *activity area* does not necessarily precede the other, but leads back to the core.

Figure 2.5 *Six activity areas of the Collective Action Toolkit* From http://www.frogdesign.com/collective-action-toolkit

The *CAT* does not use terms such as 'brainstorming' and 'prototyping' which are normally associated with design thinking, but keeps the terminology simple so that it is easily translatable into different languages. Each activity area consists of a number of activities that are described along with the number of participants and a tentative time frame, which is usually between 30 minutes and 1 hour, 45 minutes. It also contains small tips and reminders with each activity as well as suggestions for what steps to take after each activity is completed. The toolkit does not use photographs, but is rich in diagrams and step-by-step illustrations to aid understanding. As an open source guide, the *CAT* is easy to download and print on A4 sheets. Dotted lines running through the middle of the page suggest folding or cutting making it practical for use in the field. Apart from enabling communities to solve problems, build new skills and gain knowledge, which are the three aims presented in the toolkit, the *CAT* serves as an

excellent example of an egalitarian approach to problem solving in the way it outlines methods that value each participant's thoughts and ideas.

The toolkits described above seem to suggest a trend in open-source content that speaks to the D.I.Y movement in design, however Liz Sander's work acts as a foil to these toolkits. Her body of work involves individually crafting toolkits for specific design problems; so while her toolkits may contain transferable methodologies, they are not primarily created for reuse. She has a diverse repertoire which includes applications from education and healthcare to industrial design. With years of experience in human-centred design research, Sanders work hinges on her understanding that there is often a discrepancy between what people *say, do* and *make*. The first two categories have been explored through design ethnography, interviews, cultural probes and observational methods, so she focuses on the make component of generative design research. Though there is no one definitive toolkit, Sanders speaks of the ingredients of *make* toolkits, which include sets of triggers that prompt associations and memories. These trigger sets are specifically aggregated for each tool kit and may include photographs, words, symbolic shapes, cartoon-like expressions, systematic sets showing a collection or scale of emotions or actions, puppets, velcro-covered 3D shapes, collections of material used for embellishment and lego/building blocks (Sanders and Stappers, 2012, p.71). These ingredients are presented in varying degrees of abstraction; by including the word triggers in the kits, they also accommodate those who prefer thinking with words rather than images. Sanders and Stappers point to 5 guidelines when composing a *make* toolkit: The sets of triggers should contain variation in content, abstraction, aesthetics, form and levels of ambiguity and openness. That is, the toolkits should encourage interaction and be approachable enough for participants to feel comfortable using them. (Sanders and Stappers, 2012, pg. 72). A key factor to remember is that although the toolkits should contain a sufficient number of prompts, there should not be an overwhelming amount of content, nor should there be too little time for them to process them. Sanders gives a rough guideline of 15 minutes of collage-making for a set of 100 words and 100 images.

In discussing toolkits, they also point to 5 different types of toolkits that they have had success with. The first is emotional toolkits; these are used for evoking memories of the past using photographs, words and phrases. Dolls' house toolkits by comparison are 3D and may contain scaled models, building blocks and embellishing items. These tend to focus on representational, solution based research. Storyline toolkits help define the course a story takes through the use of a timeline on a background

where visual triggers and word triggers may be used to construct a chronological story. Cognitive toolkits and group cognitive toolkits tend to deal with relationships to ideas or objects, so the triggers may be more symbolic than the storyline toolkits. In the group cognitive toolkits care is taken to make the components big enough to be viewed as a group and at a distance. Each toolkit takes into consideration restrictions of resources such as a time, a budget or the location where it is to be used, they can also be modified to adapt to the different levels of ease that the participants could experience in the activity. The area of study also plays a pivotal role. Some research is aimed at analyzing what is intangible, such as emotions, stories or relationships whereas others are aimed at more tangible data such as form, function or layout, therefore the components of each toolkit depends on the applications of the findings (Sanders and Stappers, 2012, p. 73).

Chapter 3
Talking Things Toolkit

The methodology used in creating the *Talking Things* toolkit is a triangulation of literature reviews, user testing and precedent research, including the analysis of the toolkits mentioned in the previous chapter. Like Frog's toolkit for collective action, *Talking Things* is not aimed at designers, but rather is a primary facilitation tool that fosters a basic level of mutual trust, respect and understanding amongst participants who intend to work collectively on medium to long-term projects; particularly within a community setting. In some ways it can be seen as a preamble to the HCD or CAT.

Talking Things began as an inquiry into the opportunities to bridge *social capital* through the *exchange of narratives*. After attending storytelling and community building events in Vancouver, it became obvious that although such opportunities do exist, those participating often took a passive role as members of an audience. This attitude was often spurred on because the participants believed that they had very little to offer as storytellers, or in some cases they lacked the confidence to speak in large groups. One participant at the Passages to Canada Workshop, Sharing Stories: Shaping Identity claimed, "If only something exciting had happened to me, I could tell my story too". *Talking Things* functions on the simple premise that we each have a personal narrative which when shared allows us to form deeper connections to one another, recognize similar areas of interest and makes us more willing to collaborate on future projects with each other. However, these narratives need to first be recognized.

A *Talking Things* workshop is set up using similar design principles to the Wold Cafe. The first step towards this is setting the context for the workshop. This may be to bring an existing group closer together, to establish connections within a new group or to be used as the first workshop in a series aimed at finding out more about community concerns. Each workshop is preceded by an invitation to participants to bring along an object of personal significance that reminds them of *home*. This may be an object that has a place in the home or that evokes a particular memory that is linked to the home. This short descriptor keeps the word *home* deliberately ambiguous, so that participants are free to interpret the word as they like. Often this gives added insight into what each participant considers to be *home*. Some interpret this as their country of origin, for others it is where they currently live and for some even a place that they hope to return to. In most cases the participants take the word *home* to be synonymous with comfort. At the same time, the type of object or its value is not important, so long as it is evocative for the participant. During different iterations of this activity, people brought childhood toys, lego, jewelry, mugs, pieces of handmade art, key-chains, keys, mementos from travels,

books, gifts that they would never forget and even a found object whose function is unknown, but that evokes a special time and place in the memory of the participant. In at least two cases a person brought an object from home that they claimed had no significant value, but in talking about it, created a new-found appreciation for what it represented. Participants that have not brought an object to the workshop are asked to either use an significant object that they have on their person, such as a bunch of keys or an accessory that they wear every day; or alternatively to think of an object that they can draw/describe to the rest of the group.

The second principle is to create a hospitable space for the participants. The set-up for the workshops are largely the same. A large table (or several smaller tables joined together) is set up in the middle of a bright, comfortable room. A table with snacks, beverages and water is usually set up to the side, which adds to creating an informal and inviting atmosphere. A world map, which is included in the toolkit, is taped to a wall with a reasonable amount of space in front of it to allow people to interact with it freely. At the other end of the room a make-shift photo booth and audio recording station may be set up, where each participant could be invited to record their story and pose for a photograph with their object after the session. Creating a hospitable space has to do with more than the physical layout of the room. The facilitator should establish an atmosphere of safety and respect in which all participants feel supported when sharing their stories; this coincides with the third World Café principle in which everyone is encouraged to contribute. Tips for how to do this are also included in the facilitator guide. The last three principles, namely, connect perspectives, listen together for patterns and insights and share collective discoveries are implemented as the activities progress.
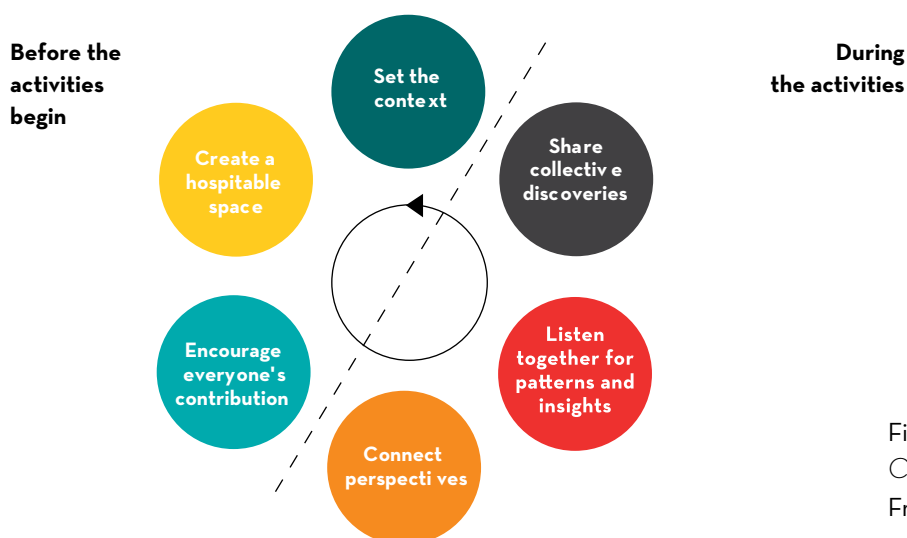
Figure 3.1 *Six of the seven World Cafe design principles*
From http://www.theworldcafe.com/principles.html

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The *Talking Things* toolkit caters to a maximum of 15 participants per session. If more than 15 participants attend, the facilitator may improvise by encouraging the participants to share materials and adjusting the time-frame of the activities accordingly.

The toolkit includes:

- 15 object-cards
- 1 large prompt card
- 1 custom-made dice
- 1 world map + 4 pins
- 15 x 6 collage sheets
    - 1 shape and arrow sheet
    - 1 places and spaces sheet
    - 1 speech bubbles and word prompts sheet
    - 1 people and gestures sheet
    - 1 miscellaeneous sheet
- 15 blank A3 sized sheets
- A Facilitator guide

Additional materials required are 15 scissors, several glue sticks, coloured pens, pencils etc. that should be shared amongst the participants. Although the *Talking Things* workshop is meant primarily to create a collective experience, it is strongly recommended that audio recording devices and a camera with a tripod be used to record and collect the stories shared after gaining the participant's permission.

Figure 3.2 *The ideal set-up of a room for the Talking Things workshop*
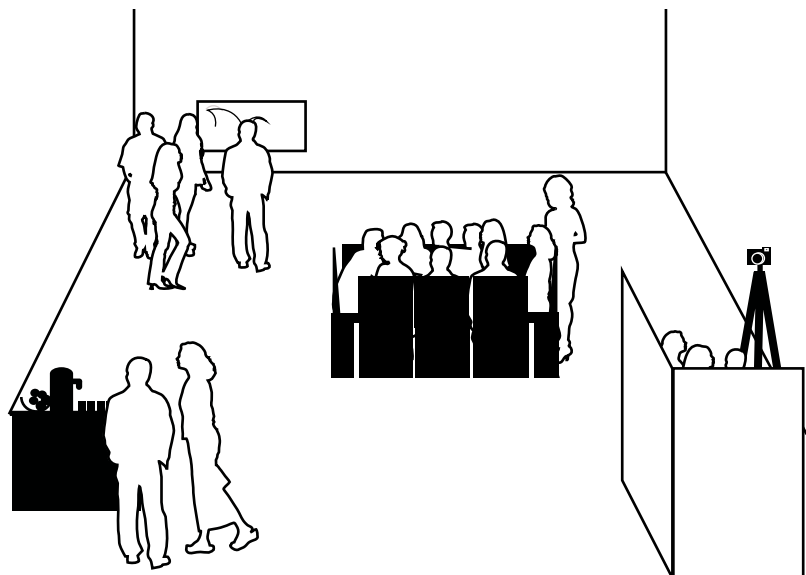
The 3 activities described in the *Talking Things* toolkit ascribe to Dan Pink's 6 senses, (which will be described in detail in chapter 8) and were specially designed to be varied in the depth of personal stories that they evoke. The first activity uses the object-cards, the prompt card and the custom-made dice. The participants are instructed that they will be using their own objects for the 2nd and 3rd activities, but for the 1st activity they must choose one of the 18 object-cards from the toolkit. The cards are A4 sized for better visibility when showed from a distance. The objects on these cards are mostly generic and have been selected after analyzing the range of objects found in Sherry Turkle's book, *Evocative Objects*, the Portland Art Museum's online showcase of *Object Stories* and the self-proclaimed *Literary and Economic Experiment: Significant Objects.*

Figure 3.3 *A sampling of the object-cards from the Talking Things toolkit*

The participants are encouraged to pick an object-card that they respond to, whether positively or negatively. Sitting around the table, the participants take turns tossing a custom-made dice that has a different colour on each face. The colours correspond to different questions on the prompt card, which the facilitator reads out loud at each turn of the dice. This component takes about 45 minutes for 15 participants, which allows the participants roughly 10 minutes to choose their object cards, 2 minutes per person to roll the dice and share their story and then 5 minutes at the end for the facilitator to check-in and recap the activity. This activity is meant to get the participants comfortable with talking about an object that is not their own, before proceeding to share their object and its story.

Figure 3.4 *Activity 1: A participant at the field test talking about the object card she picked* Zara N. Contractor

What made you choose this object?
Is it something you like? Or want to own? Does it remind you of something?

Do you own anything like this?
Is it something you want to own? Or something you used to own but lost?

Who does this object remind you of?
It could be someone who has something like this. It could be someone who would love this object or even some who would hate it.

What do you think this object means to the person who owns it?
Is it something they would love? Would they use it every day? Sometimes? Never? What would happen if they lost or broke this?

Does this object remind you of a particular time or place in your life?
Do you have any memories of an object like this? How old were you? Where did you live?

What does this object make you feel like?
Is it an object that is familiar to you? Or is it new to you? Does it make you excited or nostalgic?

Figure 3.5 *Activity 1: The prompt card from the Talking Things toolkit* Zara N. Contractor

Once each participant has had a chance to answer a question, they should be requested to take out their own objects and set them on the table in front of themselves. The facilitator should explain that they have now made the transition to talking about their own objects.

Stories often rely on a place and a setting, activity 2 is meant to give a spatial context to the story by opening up the dialogue on where the object comes from, has been to and is currently situated. To illustrate this, each participant picks a coloured pen and in turn, marks the journey that their object has taken on a world map, adding their names underneath. For this activity the facilitator is encouraged to first draw the journey of his or her object as an example for the participants. Some objects have a history that spans several generations and countries; others have shorter histories and may not have a global travel story. The facilitator is encouraged to recognize this and to put the participants at ease with their object's journey. Since only one participant can draw on the map at a time, the rest may be invited to gather around and watch, to mingle with other participants or to get light refreshments if provided. This activity should not take more than 20 minutes.
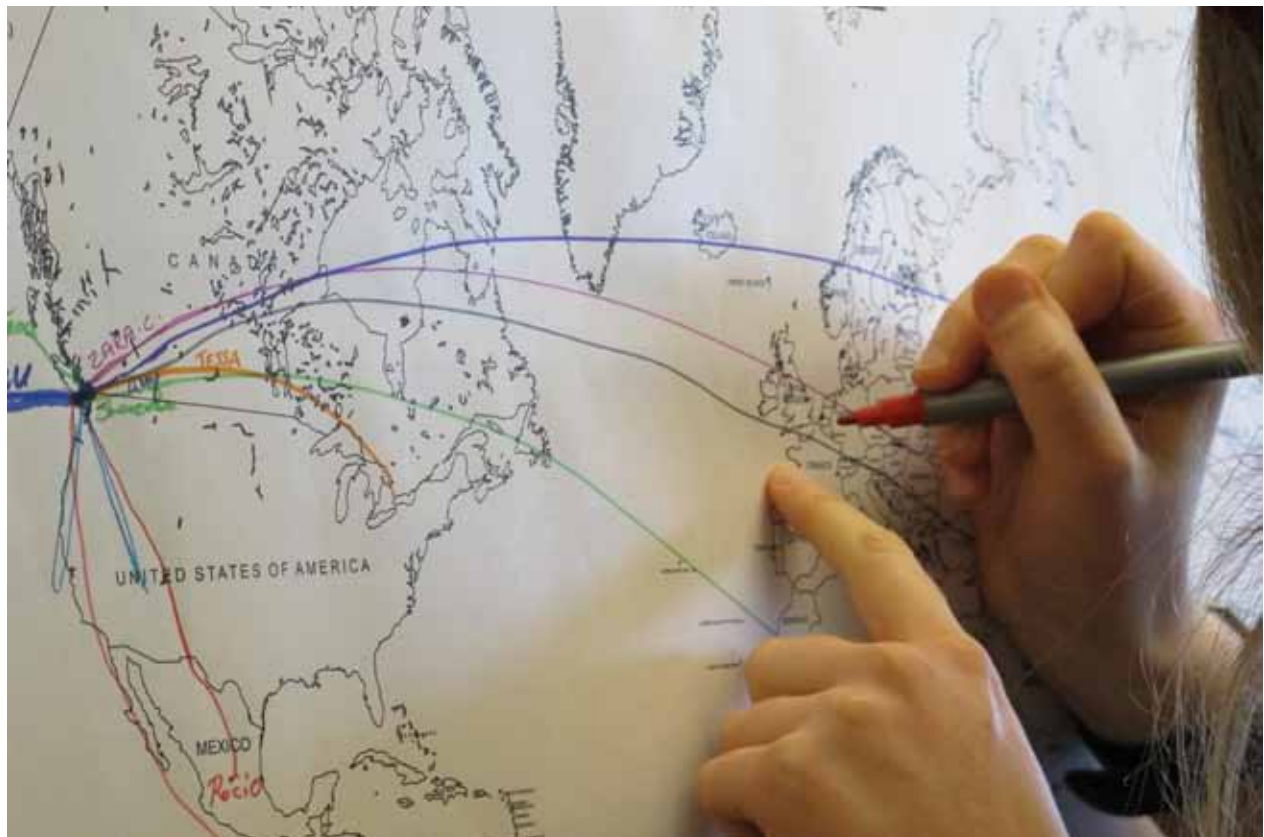
Figure 3.6 *Activity 2: Detail of the object journeys drawn on the map during the field test* Zara N. Contractor

Before the start of the third activity, the facilitator should re-cap that activity 2 was meant to set the context for the story of the object, while also being a visual representation of the participants coming together in a particular city, bringing their respective experiences with them.

For activity 3 the participants are each given a piece of paper and image/word collage sheets from which to construct their own collage. The collage is meant to act as a visual guide of the story behind each participant's object. It should be a place where each participant collects their thoughts and recalls the significant milestones, people, places and emotions that relate to their object's story. These collage sheets contain a range of triggers that have been carefully selected to cover a range of possible experiences, however the participants are encouraged to add words or drawings of their own that will later help them tell their story. Participants are encouraged to develop their own style of collage and should be reassured that the collages will vary stylistically from one participant to the next.

Figure 3.7 *Activity 3: Creating a visual guide using the image/word triggers during the field test* Zara N. Contractor

CLOSE   LIFESTYLE   SAD
FAR   MORALS   HAPPY
BOND   HABITS   EXCITED
SOCIETY   MOOD   SCARED
PLACE   SCHOOL   ANGRY
PLAYGROUND UNIVERSITY   DISSAPOINTED
CLASSROOM   OFFICE   NOSTALGIC
GYM   BUILDING   PLAYFUL
TAUGHT   INSTITUTION   SERIOUS
DISCOVERED FAMILY   GRATEFUL
            FRIEND   ANNOYED
            FRIENDS   TIRED
            RELATIONSHIP ENERGETIC
                          HOPEFUL
                          ALONE

Figure 3.8 *Activity 3: Image word triggers on the collage sheets (contd. on pg. 30)* **Zara N. Contractor**

CITY	ROOM	TRAVEL	MOVING	TRANSPORT	LANDSCAPE	TASTE
COUNTRY	FOOD	JOURNEY	CHANGE	COMMUTE	SCENERY	SMELL
TOWN	COOKING	DESTINATION	DIFFERENT	DAILY	NATURE	TOUCH
VILLAGE	SLEEPING	TIME	SAME	EXTRAORDINARY	NORMAL	FEELINGS
NEIGHBOURHOOD	PLAYING	HISTORY	RECOGNIZE	ROADS	ANIMALS	SEE
COMMUNITY	FIGHTING	DISCOVERY	UNRECOGNIZEABLE	PATHWAYS	PETS	HEAR

The image/word triggers are based on Liz Sanders' 2D collage triggers and similarly range in abstraction. They are spread over 5 pages, each with a loosely defined category. There are a series of 20 abstract shapes in 4 bold colours along with a set of 18 arrows; 18 place and space prompts; 10 speech bubbles; 25 people and gestures and 12 miscellaneous images with modes of travel and animal/pets. In addition to this there are about 80 word prompts for those who prefer words to images.

The participants are given 20-30 minutes to complete their collages (based roughly on Sanders' guideline) after which they are invited to share their stories with the group. Each participant gets a few minutes for their story, this can range from 2-3 minutes to 5-10 minutes, depending on the time available as well as the levels of engagement amongst the participants. As a rule of thumb, if there are less than 8 participants, the stories tend to stretch longer and a dialogue often ensues. For larger groups, the story-sharing should be kept under 3 minutes each so that the group remains engaged.

Figure 3.9 *Activity 3: Some of the participants sharing their stories during the field test* Zara N. Contractor

Before the participants begin to share their stories, the facilitator should ask the participants to be open to different perspectives and beliefs while also being mindful of collective themes and patterns in the narratives. After the participants share their stories, one or two participants can be invited to share the recurring themes and point to the meta-narratives running through the stories; once again these methods of collective listening and concluding are part of the 7 design principles used in the World Café.

At the conclusion of the third activity, the facilitator should thank everyone for their participation and invite them to continue their discussions. If time permits, he or she should also point to the recurring themes and the community activities that the participants can develop around them. After this the participants should be invited to record their stories at the audio booth and/or take photographs of

themselves with their objects. These may be individual portraits or group photographs of those that have similar objects, similar stories or simply a shared interest. The facilitator's guide contains details on how to set up a make-shift audio and photography booth and while a video camera may be used to record the whole session, recording individual stories tends to make the participants more self-conscious than audio or photography and therefore isn't recommended.

The toolkit is deliberately designed so that it can be reused: Each of its components is housed in a portable wooden box that allows for each activity to be quickly accessed and then stored after use. The facilitator guide as well as the components of activity 1 are reusable, whereas I am currently in the process of creating a web-page from which the components of activities 2 & 3 may be downloaded and used as needed.

Although the sense of community forged within the participants of the workshops are the strongest, the facilitator guide also contains suggestions which involve a larger number of community members. Local photographers and sound editors from within the community may be approached to document the workshops; which (with the appropriate permission) may be displayed around the community at a later date. Designers from within the community may also be enlisted to compile the stories into a book housed at the community library and/or other such areas. They may also be hired to give the stories an online presence and to consolidate the stories from multiple workshops in one place. Artists, poets and writers may be requested to interpret the stories and the workshop and create works of based them. Graphic note-takers may be asked to record a workshop and display their visual notes in public spaces or at events in order to extend the reach of the group and spark more interest in community engagement.

However, in disseminating and sharing these stories, appropriate permission must be obtained. Because the creation of the *Talking Things* toolkit relied on primary research, a rigorous research ethics review process was undertaken before any testing was carried out. Forms for informed consent and the release of information were developed as part of the research ethics protocol, which were signed by all the participants prior to the pilot and field tests. The nature of the project and its role as a component of the research undertaken during a graduate program was explained, both verbally and within the forms. Care was also taken to mention that all parts of the project were entirely optional and that the participants could choose to remain anonymous and/or decline to be recorded by digital media. It is strongly suggested that consent and model release forms be used whenever the *Talking Things* toolkit is employed, particularly if photographs and audio recordings of the participants are being taken.

Dealing with Obstacles and Resistance

As with any undertaking that is aimed at bringing about a change in behaviour; there was a small percentage of participants (1 out of 20 participants at the field test at the South Vancouver Neighbourhood House) who were initially apprehensive about using the *Talking Things* toolkit.

Prior to the workshop, the facilitator was sceptical about the gamified aspect of the first activity as well as the participants' willingness to work with collage materials in order to share their story. She informed me that she would improvise if the participants did not respond favourably to the activities.

After explaining the goals of the workshop, the participants showed a keen interest in Activity 1 and shared short anecdotes and stories through their object cards.

The facilitator was soon at ease with the activity and continued to call out the questions from the prompt card. This initial resistance was echoed by one of the participants as well. She resisted using the object cards claiming that none of the images resonated with her and when her turn came, used short, terse phrases to respond to the prompts. Within a short span of time she saw the other participants responding to the prompts in a light-hearted way and was more at ease with activities 2 & 3; sharing her own story enthusiastically at the end of the workshop.

Participants may also be unwilling (or in a rare case, unable) to bring along an object; or unwilling to share their story with the group. Here it is imperative to remember the goal of the toolkit, which is to foster a *sense of community* and *mutual trust*. While the toolkit describes the workshop in detail and provides tips for dealing with resistance, it does rely on a willing and capable facilitator who is able to conduct the workshop in a manner that encourages but doesn't force participation.

Chapter 4
Testing the *Talking Things* Toolkit in the Field

Given the broad range of circumstances in which the *Talking Things* toolkit may be applied, choosing a test site was not as easy as I had imagined. I decided to narrow down my search to community centres and neighbourhood houses within Vancouver. In order to have a cross-cultural experience, the other criterion was to have a diverse population. While researching the community centres and neighbourhood houses, I came across the South Hill Community website which featured a local storytelling project called *Inside Stories*. Apart from being well-designed, *Inside Stories* was an interactive, online repository for short personal narratives of people from the South Vancouver neighbourhood. The project was a collaborative venture between a creative team, the South Vancouver Neighbourhood House (SVNH) and the residents of the community. With a project so closely aligned to my own, I approached the SVNH with the idea of running a *Talking Things* workshop on their premises. The only stipulation that I had was that I required a facilitator from the SVNH to conduct the workshop.

The toolkit was tested on the Women's Multicultural Support Group at the SVNH. This was a group of women who meet once a week to share life experiences and build a support network within their neighbourhood. The ages of the women ranged from those in their early twenties, to those over 60 years of age. The women came from diverse backgrounds and each of them had spent different amounts of time in Vancouver and in the community; some had lived in the same neighbourhood for over 20 years and some had arrived in Vancouver as little as 6 months ago. Since anyone was welcome to drop-in and join the group, the workshop was planned to accommodate up to 18 participants, some of whom were familiar with each other and some who had met for the first time. Prior to the workshop, the facilitator from the SVNH had requested the regular attendees to bring an object of personal significance that reminded them of *home*.

Given the different variables at play, such as the setting, the participants and even the time allocated to the workshop, the results yielded are always slightly different each time that a toolkit is deployed. Despite having gone through several iterations and a pilot test, the field test for *Talking Things* at the SVNH was a combination of expected outcomes as well as new experiences.

The workshop was set up in a large room with several tables joined together in the middle to create a large enough work space. Coloured pens and pencils were set out on the table along with 15 pairs of scissors and 8 glue sticks. On one wall there was a white board where the facilitator had written out the agenda for the day, including my name and a short line saying that this was an activity being conducted by a student from the Emily Carr University. Next to the white board was a hand-made poster with a list of 'group agreements': active participation, respect, confidentiality and a noncritical attitude were in this 'agreement'. An easel with

the world-map was set up at the side so that it could be used when necessary. In a corner of the room a small table with coffee and snacks was set up: given the different dietary needs that are inevitable in a group, care was taken to have a selection of different snacks including fresh fruit and vegetables.

Due to time constraints, the workshop was to be conducted for two hours. When the workshop started there were 12 participants, the facilitator from the SVNH, myself and a former graduate from the Emily Carr University, Nayeli Jimenez, who was assisting me with note-taking. Although the facilitator was given a guide to the *Talking Things* workshop a week before the workshop, she chose to extemporize the workshop. The workshop began with a *'check-in'* where the facilitator asked each person to announce their name and to tell the group how they were feeling that day. The mood was predominantly light-hearted and energetic. Several women pointed to the gorgeous, sunny weather as a reason for their positivity. As the women in the group introduced themselves, one wished the group *'Happy International Women's day'* which the group agreed was a great coincidence. Nayeli and I joined the group to introduce ourselves and I went on to introduce the project, request the participation of the group and assist them in filling out the required consent forms before beginning. During this time several more women had joined the group and there was a new total of 19 participants. Initially the consent forms were approached apprehensively and the language barriers were evident, but eventually the participants were made to feel comfortable with the process. Some of the women who had been there for the introduction helped the new-comers with the consent form and gave them the gist of the project. Of the 19 participants only 2 requested to remain anonymous.

Figure 4.1 *Activity 1: Participants with their object cards during the field test at the SVNH* Zara N. Contractor

Figure 4.2 (Left) *Activity 1: The custom made dice from the Talking Things toolkit* Zara N. Contractor

Figure 4.3 (Right) *Activity 1: A participant shows her object card to the group while the facilitator reads her a question, during the field test at the SVNH* Zara N. Contractor

The facilitator introduced the first activity and handed out the object-cards to the group, asking the participants to pick a card that resonated with them. Since there were fewer cards than people, the participants were asked to share the cards so that more than one person could discuss a single object-card if they wanted to. One of the participants could not find an object that she wanted to speak about and had a hard time settling on an object-card. She was more detached than the rest during this activity and did not have much to say during her turn.

The participants took turns rolling the dice and answering the questions about the object-cards, which were read out by the facilitator. There was an element of play as they each rolled the dice and anticipated the question that the facilitator would call out. The answers revealed a range of emotions; from deeply personal wishes—the lady who picked the *teddy bear* object-card spoke about how she loved her 3 sons, but wished she had a daughter as well so she could play with cuddly stuffed-toys—to insights about themselves or their loved ones—a lady spoke about how her fiancé was always on his lap-top and so her object-card reminded her of him, another spoke of her first pet, a rabbit that her mother had bought for her as a child. There were light-hearted moments too; one of the participants admitted that she was chronically late and so had picked the *watch* object-card in the hopes that she would start being on time, another woman spoke of how her

employer always insisted that she wear closed shoes for safety and so that was the card that resonated with her the most. Despite the disparity in age of the participants and the fact that they were from very different parts of the world including China, Hong Kong, Ireland, Mexico, Colombia, India, Philippines, Korea, Sweden, UK, Macau and Canada; the participants smiles and nods throughout were an indication that they related to each other's stories, especially since the themes that ran through them were so universal.
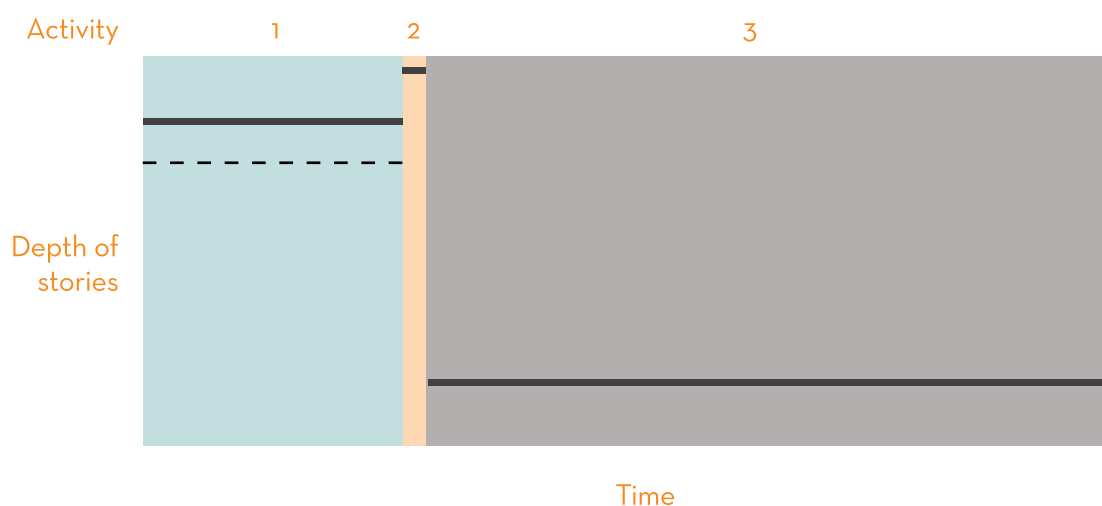
Figure 4.4 *Activity 1: Depth of stories through the activities. The solid black line indicates the depth of stories expected to be shared, whereas the dashed line is what was actually shared* Zara N. Contractor

The three activities that are described in *Talking Things* evoke stories of different depths amongst the participants. During this field test the group shared deeper stories than expected during the first activity; despite language barriers and evident shyness. Perhaps the reason for this openness was because the participants were somewhat familiar with each other, or perhaps because of the nature of the group, in which a lot of the participants were used to sharing their stories with each other, nevertheless, it set a good tone for the rest of the activities.

After the first activity, the participants were asked to take out their own objects and place them on the table. The facilitator asked those who did not bring an object to improvise and use something that they might have on them instead. It took a few minutes for those participants to decide on their objects, but in the meanwhile those who already had their objects were invited to draw the journey of their object on the map. The facilitator did not explain that the second activity was intended to give the object's story a context and a setting, so I drew the journey of my object first, explaining that it had been bought in Thailand and went with me to Pakistan and finally to Canada. I then invited the rest to draw their object's journeys on the map.

Figure 4.5 *Activity 2: Locating Macau on the map* Zara N. Contractor

Figure 4.6 *Activity 2: Journeys around the world* Zara N. Contractor

After the first participant approached the map and drew the path of her object, others got up to take a closer look. What resulted was a collaborative spirit where people were helping each other find locations on the map. One lady could not find Macau—her country of origin—on the map, several others gathered around her to see if they could find it. Eventually it was decided that they would approximate the location and add the label to the map themselves. There was a palpable sense of fun in the room as people laughed about their geography skills and interacted with each other's journeys. The lines drawn on the map displayed signs of creativity too, for example, two people drew their lines the opposite way; so instead of drawing the line across the map from Asia to Vancouver, they drew a line to the east-side border of the map and then drew another line coming from the west-side of the map into Vancouver.

While some of the participants were gathered around the map, others helped themselves to snacks. A few of the younger women from the group gathered together and talked amongst themselves about the activity and the weather. A few people approached me to ask what was next and why there were art supplies on the table. After about 20 minutes, when all the participants had a chance to draw on the map, the facilitator introduced the 3rd activity.

Although the facilitator privately voiced her concern that the women may not engage with the activity and suggested that the time spent on this component be reduced, after a few minutes the participants seemed to be immersed in their collage-making. Four participants requested further clarification for this part of the project and it was increasingly clear that the explanation linking the mapping activity to the collage activity needed to be more explicit.

Figure 4.7 *Activity 3: The participants creating their collages at the SVNH* Zara N. Contractor

Figure 4.8 *Activity 3: Creating collages at the SVNH* **Zara N. Contractor**

Figure 4.9 *Activity 3: Using words and images to create collages* **Zara N. Contractor**

Figure 4.10 *Activity 3: An example of abstract shapes being used to construct a collage* Zara N. Contractor

Figure 4.11 *Activity 3: Another example of a collage* Zara N. Contractor

Despite the fact that this was an individual activity, the women helped each other, in translating certain words and in clarifying what the instructions meant. It was evident that there was a lot of thought put into the collages. Some drew landscapes, others created mind-maps. As expected, the triggers prompted a range of creative responses. Some gravitated towards creating their own images from abstract shapes while others responded better to the figurative images. The resulting collages represented a range of thought processes and techniques. The 25 minutes set aside for the collage seemed to fly by and more than half the people were still working on the activity when the facilitator requested them to move on to the story-sharing phase.

For this part of the activity the facilitator invited each participant to bring their object and collage to the front of the room and share their story. This helped accommodate the large number of participants, but did impede the dialogic aspect of the story-sharing. This component started off with a light-hearted narrative where a participant lamented how fast time flies, she spoke of how she had arrived in Vancouver as a young woman 20 years ago, but now every where she goes she is referred to as a 'senior citizen'. There was a good natured giggle from the room that assured the participant that despite struggling with a language barrier, she had conveyed her message with the aid of her collage. Following her lead several others brought their objects and collages to the front of the room and shared their stories. Many spoke of objects that held spiritual and cultural significance and in one case, even of a

Figure 4.12 *Activity 3: Sharing emotions through stories of objects. (left) Uncertainty and (right) joy*
Zara N. Contractor

family heirloom that had been passed down over a 100 years to a lady, when it was traditional to pass down such tokens to the males in the family. The travel stories contained a mix of optimism and hope as well as wistfulness and nostalgia. In one case a lady spoke of how she was given her object by her then 4 year old granddaughter, she still cherishes that object 15 years later and carries it everywhere. As she recalled this memory and told us that she wasn't sure when she would be able to meet her granddaughter again, her voice broke and there were visible tears in her eyes. The lady nearest to her immediately comforted her by patting her arm. The rest of the room nodded silently indicating that they could relate to her story.

By openly sharing her emotions, she inadvertently set a precedent for the stories to come, where the group dynamic became more open, trusting and intimate. There were several recurrent themes in the narratives such as loneliness, loss and childhood memories. There was also a great focus on spiritualism and traditions from different cultures yet most of the participants seemed to acknowledge the similarities that existed within this diverse mix of cultures. In a few notable cases there were insights into family and relationships. One lady even excitedly announced that she was going to get her marriage license the next day at which the whole group began to clap and cheer (fig 4.12, right). As the activity drew to a close, participants were more visibly relaxed and were actively participating in the stories that were being shared. Even the participant who was originally sceptical was far more at ease and willingly shared her story with the group.

After the group had shared their stories, I thanked the participants and shared my object and its story with the group as a gesture of reciprocity. Given the short amount of time and large number of participants, it wasn't possible to take individual portraits, or to record their stories on an audio recorder. With the few minutes that were remaining, the participants were requested to fill out evaluation forms and then most of them continued conversations that were started during the story-sharing sessions. One participant wanted to know more about the Masters program at Emily Carr University and how I was able to combine design with storytelling and community engagement. Some of the participants approached me and gave me positive feedback on the activity and asked whether I would be conducting it again at the SVNH. Two of the younger participants offered suggestions for where I could hold the next *Talking Things* workshop and even discussed other activities that the group could work on collectively in the weeks to come which included ideas based on crafts and creativity. It is this level of engagement that I was hoping for from *Talking Things;* in which the participants were

fully engaged with the activity and with each other, in which they shared deep personal stories and concerns while recognizing that most themes to do with *home* tend to be universal, and above all, to spark ideas of further community engagement projects that will continue the dialogues started by *Talking Things* even after the workshop was over. For people working within the community engagement and development sphere there were important insights into the lives of these women, one of the most important being that many of them feel lonely while their husbands are at work and welcome the opportunity to create ties within the community.

At the end of the workshop, Nayeli Jimenez who had assisted me with the note-taking said "Personally, I felt a part of the group even though I didn't participate in the activities. I got to meet some of the participants in the end who have similar cultural backgrounds as me. I even got invited to a ceremony for a woman who will be receiving her Canadian citizenship in two weeks!" The workshop only lasted for 2 hours on a Fiday afternoon, but it seems as if the experience will last much longer in the participant's memories.

Figure 4.13 *Activity 3: Participants actively listening to the stories being shared* Zara N. Contractor
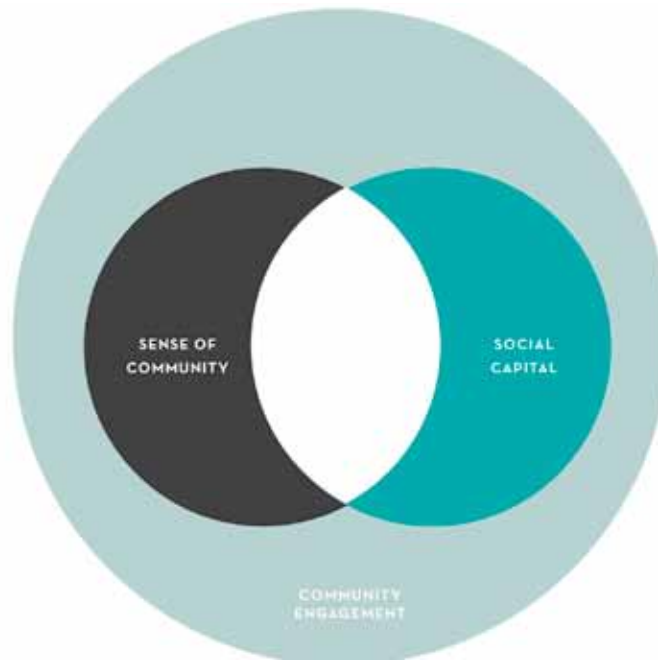
Chapter 5
Community Concepts

Figure 5.1 *Some aspects of community engagement* Zara N. Contractor

The concept of *social capital* has been analyzed from the points of view of sociologists, policy-makers, urbanists and economists. Activist, author and urbanist Jane Jacobs popularized the concept in the 1960s after which it has become extensively woven into the economic and social science discourse. More recently, it has made its way into dialogues about human services (Pooley et al., 2005). Succinctly defined as "social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness" (Putnam, 2007, p.137); *social capital* in simpler terms refers to the connectedness that results from building networks based on social norms and mutual trust that people can draw upon to solve common problems and initiate collective action within communities. Although these networks have intrinsic value for those that form them, the ability of these networks to grow and initiate positive change within communities is indicative of the extrinsic value that they could also possess (Putnam, 2007, p.138).

Social capital must be nurtured in order to counteract feelings of mistrust that often exist in modern, urban centers due to the mix of people from different backgrounds. Where there is merit in creating and nurturing networks of those with whom we share similarities that is within a homogenous group there is also much to be gained from connections formed between people of a heterogeneous group.

Putnam makes the distinction between what he calls '*bonding social capital*', which speaks of ties

fostered between people that share commonalities such as age, class or ethnicity and *'bridging social capital'*, which deals with connecting to those who don't share these commonalities. In the latter case particularly, he points out that 'an active cultural environment including activities that help people better share their cultures and stories' is seminal for a group of people to develop the 'capacity to cooperate and build social and civic connections' (Borrup, p. 7). The *Talking Things* Workshop becomes an instantiation of such an environment.

Social capital, correlates to a *sense of community*. That is to say, studies show that when a person feels like they belong to a place or a community, that feeling strengthens the connections between themselves and others who belong to the same place/community.

Before delving into the role that these two constructs play in community engagement, it is important to define community. The meaning of the word varies according to the context: it may be defined as the commonality, sharing and belonging of and to a physical space, deepened by the social, civic and economic bonds that are shared by the residents of that geographic location (Borrup, 2006, p. 4). Whereas the etymology of the word has its roots in the Latin word for common, 'communis' which refers to what is "public, general, shared by all or many", community, or 'communitas' refers to fellowship or to the concept of belonging (Esposito, 2010, p. 9).

A feeling of belonging to a community therefore speaks to a sense of connectedness and sharing, condensed to the phrase a *sense of community* proposed by psychologists McMillan and Chavis in 1986. Their definition illustrates that the very idea of community has more to do with cultivating a sense of belonging and connection than with spatiality and supports the origins of the word 'common'. Cultivating this sense of belonging and connection in the urban neighbourhoods of developed countries may be difficult considering the composition often includes populations of different ethnicities, lifestyles, faiths and economic strata coexisting within a space (Borrup, 2006, p. 10). Therefore, an environment that supports building a *sense of community* must also address *bridging social capital* by helping transcend the disparities mentioned above.

These differences are what Barthes might refer to as differences in *culture*. As mentioned before, Barthes views *culture* as a 'way of everyday life' (qtd. in Hebdige, 2012, p. 126) if one is to ascribe to this semiotic view of *culture*, by virtue of using the *exchange of personal narratives* to bridge these differences, then the *Talking Things* toolkit is said to function *cross-culturally* to build an everyday *culture* of coexistence.

 In their working paper titled *Culture as a Key Dimension of Sustainability: Exploring Concepts,*

Themes and Models, Nancy Duxbury and Eileen Gillette highlight the cultural aspects inherent both in dialogues on sustainability, as well as community development.

They point to what they call *'Community Cultural Development'*, as an integral part of any nascent structures that deal with sustainability. This includes "a huge range of activities that give communities the opportunity to tell their stories, build their creative skills and be active participants of their culture...through a collaborative, creative exploration of ideas and issues that social and developmental changes take place" (O'Hara qtd. in Duxbury et al. 2007, p. 7) which is reminiscent of Putnam's vision of an *'active cultural environment'*. Although traditionally *'Community Cultural Development'* refers to artists working within communities, the definition has broadened to encompass creativity in general: *'Community Cultural Development'* "is a collective process, often involving creativity interpreted in the broadest sense. This contributes to changes in people's lives and long-term developmental benefits for a community" (Mills & Brown, qtd in Duxbury et al., 2007)

Duxbury et al., mapped the key characteristics of *'Community Cultural Development'* over the list of the characteristics of socially sustainable communities as laid out by the British Columbia Round Table on the Environment and Economy published in 1993.

Three key areas where the list created by Duxbury et al. overlap with the objectives of this project are:

- Fostering common experiences that express a sense of community
- Increasing community participation and dialogue
- Supporting activities and events that increase their sense of connection with the community (adapted from Duxbury et al.)

Considering that the top ranked issue concerning Vancouverites was a "growing sense of isolation and disconnection...that hurts them personally and hurts their community" (Vancouver Foundation, Connections and Engagement: A survey of metro Vancouver, June 2012), these three objectives become even more pertinent. The *Talking Things* toolkit and subsequent workshop provides an opportunity for community members to meaningfully engage with one another and recognize the potential to collaborate on a shared platform regarding community issues, creating a shared experience in order to strengthen the interpersonal connections needed to build social capital, while encouraging the feeling of rootedness, synonymous with a sense of community.

Chapter 6
Spatial Stories

Place and Space

In order to examine the idea of connecting to and with a community, it is necessary to address notions of *place* and *space*.

De Certeau speaks of *place* as order or stability; *place* is a fixed state of being whereas '*Space* is a practiced *Place*' that is, *space* is composed of intersections of mobile elements, whereas a *place* is an instantaneous configuration of positions, that implies stability. The task of converting *places* to *spaces* and vice versa, is carried out by stories, which De Certeau introduces as vehicles that organize and connect *places*.

He refers to them as '*spatial trajectories*', which by virtue of being in motion transform a *place* into a *space* and/or a *space* into a *place*. So although he initially seems to be presenting *place* and *space* as complementary to each other, it is soon apparent that the two are able to transform from one state to another with fluidity. With these functions of organizing and collecting *and* animating and making static, De Certeau asserts that "every story is a travel story", that is stories exist as references to spatiality and movement.

The link between spatiality and narrative is seminal to my research work, which discusses the role of narratives in building a *sense of community* within urban neighbourhoods. This notion of 'travel stories' is particularly important when taking into consideration both local and global migration patterns. Personal narratives therefore take on a strong connection to space and movement.

The use of narratives in *Talking Things* therefore facilitates the transition of a *place* into a *space* and vice versa. Older urban neighbourhoods can be seen as a *place*: with established hierarchy and order. Such a *place* can be seen as uninviting and inflexible, especially to newcomers or young adults living there. Activities and interactions proposed by *Talking Things* allow for engagement and connections to build, social capital that transforms a place and makes it into a *space*. On the other hand, newer neighbourhoods may be characterized by flurries of activity, transient spaces that lack a sense of history and hence rootedness that is characteristic of a *place*. In this case, the role of narratives is also to break down perceived barriers and allow interactions and connections to take *place*, while also forming memories that allow for a sense of belonging or rootedness.

In most cultures, the earliest maps existed as narratives, (Turchi, 2004), in linking *place/space* with narrative, De Certeau recognizes this function of narratives or 'spatial practices' and categorizes them as either maps or tours, though the two modalities may coexist.

In *Talking Things*, participants have adopted both the map-like portrayal of a *place* and the tour-like depiction of a *space*. Maps are presented as a description of a *place*, which implies an 'imposed order'; whereas a tour denotes an exploratory series of movements. Since 'everyday stories' are composed of a series of variables that may combine infinitely, they become tour-like, 'treatments of *space*'.

The last connection De Certeau makes between narratives and spatiality is the function of a story as the marker of boundaries. Stories lay down the limits that define a space. Creating a setting for action to occur, he states, is the primary function of a story.

My research speaks to the three functions of narratives, that is, using a narrative as a means of oscillating between *spaces* and *places* (and vice versa); as a way of creating oral and visual *maps* and *tours* and lastly, as a mode of cross-cultural exchange that establishes *frontiers* and *boundaries* or differences and *bridges* which are a way to transcend those differences.

Yet, while stories set limits or *frontiers* they may concurrently define how these limits may be 'transcended' or 'displaced'. Stories may likely occur within the boundaries of a *space*, but they may also occur beyond these boundaries. So given that stories connect and organize places, they perform the dual function of defining *frontiers* and acting as *bridges*. In this role of delimiting and bridging, a spatial story becomes *cross-cultural*.

I have already explained how the exchange of narratives in *Talking Things* has the ability to forge a sense of community while also creating social capital. In the case of creating *maps/tours*, *Talking Things* asks participants to literally map out the journey that their object has taken, giving their object a context. By mapping where the objects lie, the participant who is sharing his or her story will then invite the other participants listening on a journey of their lives (which in many circumstances runs parallel to the journey of the object that reminds them of home). This tour takes us on what I call a *cross-cultural* journey: bridging physical places while also creating moveable boundaries that respect the ideological differences amongst each participant.

These *places* that are mapped out may be geographical, but they may also be 'mapped on to one's memory; that is, while some participants refer to a city, town or country, others describe a place such as a childhood home, which exist in their memories as fixed.

The tenuous relationship of *place* and *space* can be applied to Ezio Manzini's scenario of *Cosmopolitan Localism* which, speaks of maintaining an equilibrium between being rooted in a specific place and/or

community and being open to global influences; from ideas and information, to people and money. De Certeau's 'spatial stories' therefore refer to a large network that may be navigated through narrative. In this section I will take a closer look at the link between narratives and empathy; and their function in collaborative and dialogic learning.

Narratives
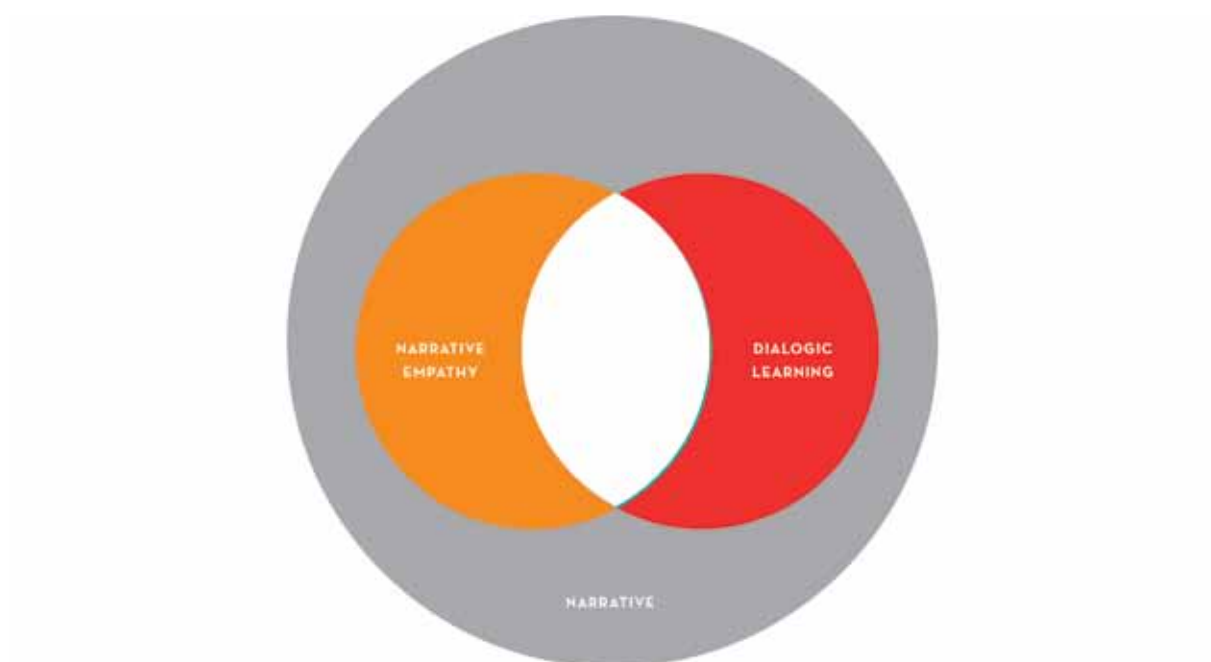
Figure 6.1 *Some aspects of narrative* Zara N. Contractor

The use of narrative is deeply rooted in history, psychology, neurological science and literary practice. Its use in history; which in itself is a collection of stories, was a way of 'making sense of experience' (Phillips, 2008, p. 2). This explanatory quality of narratives is often personified through the use of metaphor and the evocation of emotion. An emotive quality is inherent in literature (Mar, Raymond A., Oatley, Keith, Djikic, Maja and Mullin, Justin; 8) often speaking to the subconscious connections that an audience makes with the characters, plot or theme of the work.

In many cases this connection is an empathetic form of self-identification. From a neurological

standpoint, empathy can be understood as the activation of mirror neurons in the human brain (Keen, 2006, p. 207); from a more humanistic approach, empathy is an emotion that may be aroused by witnessing, reading or hearing about contexts to which one can somehow relate. If empathy is the way one imagines another to feel, (Keen, 2006, p. 208) the act of reading or hearing a story becomes a conduit for the audience to connect with the character(s) in the story (which for the purpose of this thesis is autobiographical) because they can imagine what the character is feeling in a particular situation. *Narrative empathy* differs from emotional contagion in that it requires a degree of autonomy, where emotional contagion is "the tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize facial expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person and consequently, to converge emotionally" (qtd in Keen, 2006, p. 209). Emotional contagion is strongly linked to the oral narrative tradition where the storyteller adopts the voices and facial expressions of characters. The audience subconsciously identifies the signs such as inflections in the voice and/or micro-expressions and instinctively responds to them; in effect, by recognizing and reacting to these signs we subconsciously perform a semiotic exercise.

In his paper *Narrative Learning/Learning Narratives: Storytelling, Experiential Learning and Education*, Patrick Ryan espouses Piaget's notion of narratives where "aspects of reality are linked with associative memories and fantasies and put together to communicate an understanding of the world or of ourselves" (Ryan, Patrick. 2008). In other words, we recognize symbols and form patterns of our experiences that our mind then identifies, organizes and provides us with a suitable response (Andrews et al. 2009, p. 14). Though empathetic responses vary greatly from person to person, empathy (or in some cases emotional contagion) can be further built out through narrative when the audience identifies with a character, situation or feeling (Keen, 2006, p. 209). To further unpack this interpretation of narratives, we should look at the three components of semiotics: in *Narrative theory*, the plot or story becomes the semantics, the narrative technique employed is the syntax, whereas the pragmatic is the way in which the participants act in a narrative performance. (Ryan, Marie-Laure. P. 354). Therefore the act of storytelling, either through the content of the story (semantics) or the performative (syntactic) aspect of it- which includes what Ryan refers to as para-performance elements such as expressions of the teller or inflections in the voice- "triggers multiple associative memories that make, consciously and subconsciously a complex nexus of thoughts in which storytelling/listening experience resides" (Ryan, Patrick. 2008). On this note, Walter Fisher's *'Narrative Paradigm'* goes so far as to state that humans "comprehend life as a series of

ongoing narratives".

Narrative empathy and emotional contagion have been studied by psychologists and neurologists as well as those involved in anthropology, the social sciences and literature. Each have their own metric for assessing how a story can evoke empathy, from the empirical to the conjectural, however they all agree on the power that a narrative has to shape thought and evoke an emotional response. Merna Hecht puts it simply: A narrative "informs the heart" (Hecht, 1989). She also describes a narrative as "information that allows transformation". Taking this view in conjunction with *narrative empathy*, gives rise to the idea of *'transformative storytelling'* which uses narratives as an instrument in transformative education because of the combination of informative and emotive qualities inherent in it (Philips, 2008).

The idea behind *transformative storytelling* is to achieve what Paulo Freire called *'conscientization'*, a process of a social awakening/ awareness (Phillips, 2), which is grounded in Marxist critical theory. Attaining this degree of social awakening or awareness comes from transcending dominant mythologies or traditions and moving from a state of passivity to an active state where one's own actions determine their fate. Here, Freire also speaks of the role that *dialogic learning* has to play in the development of *'conscientization'*.

Figure 6.2

Conscientization: Transformative Storytelling and community engagement
Zara N. Contractor

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I mentioned in the introduction that Freire describes dialogue as "an act where humans meet to reflect on their reality, as they make and remake it" (Freire, Schor, 1987, p. 11); Freire sees humans as a species "not built in silence but in word, work, action-reflection" and so predisposed to dialogue (Freire, 2005, p.88). The prerequisites for dialogue (according to Freire) are humility, a profound sense of love, based on equality for the world and it's people and faith in their capacity to create and change; through this combination, mutual trust between those engaged in dialogue can be fostered.

Though Freire originally put this idea forward in relation to poverty and illiteracy in Brazilian society, this sense of social awakening or responsibility activated through a dialogue that fosters mutual trust can be linked to Putnam's concept of building *social capital*, or Chavis and McMillan's idea of creating a *sense of community*; all of which speak to the importance of reciprocity, social-awareness and trust.

If narrative empathy and hence, dialogic learning play a pivotal role in the cross-cultural exchanges necessary for bridging *social capital*, how does one set the stage for them?

Despite Fischer's claim that we are 'story-telling animals', social, cultural and even personal boundaries (Miller, 2008, p.2) such as shyness can impede dialogues, particularly if they are autobiographical in nature. Here, evocative objects play the role of mediators: The next chapter looks at the role of *evocative objects*, or *'things'* in unlocking personal narratives.

Chapter 7
Evocative Objects: Everyday Things

Ben Highmore states that "As human beings we attach ourselves to the thingly world: our ordinary lives are lived out in the midst of things" (Highmore, 2002, p. 58), drawing out a synergy between people and 'things'. Meanwhile Igor Kopytoff speaks of the 'cultural biography of things': of how society and significant events construct a narrative and add value to an *object* in much the same way that they would to a human's life (Appadurai, 1986). Sherry Turkle points out how this view may urge us look at how the lives of individuals and their *objects* may be intertwined; so by asking people to unravel the narratives that lie within their *objects*, they uncover fragments of their own lives. She states that "*objects* become part of our inner lives: we use them to extend the reach of our sympathies by bringing the world within"(Turkle, 2007, p.307). This idea dovetails into Daniel Miller's notion of the *things* people possess as conduits through which we can comprehend their lives; that is, each *thing* represents a part of a person and by revealing the story of that *thing*; they reveal the story of themselves (Miller, 2008, p.2-4).

Though *material culture* is a rich realm of the social sciences that draws from many different fields and approaches, my discourse centres around Bill Brown's *'Thing theory'* and Sherry Turkle's study of *'Evocative Objects'*.

Let us first look at *'Thing Theory'*: a *thing*, Brown admits, is 'audaciously ambiguous'. It may be seen as a dichotomy of the human and nonhuman that surpasses the mere materiality of an object. In simpler terms, a thing is not defined by the function that it performs, but rather by the relationship that it has with the *subject*. Brown espouses the Heiddegerian notion whereby *subjects* and *objects* do not exist as complements to each other; nor do they merge fluidly into one another as Bruno Latour proposes in *'Actor Network Theory'*, rather we encounter *things* against a backdrop of (hegemonic values or) pre-interpreted meaning.

Brown speaks of Constructivist materialism, which personifies *objects* as "participants in shaping the world" thereby politicizing *objects* to create an intimate, semiotic relationship between the subject and object. Unlike an artefact which is by definition, man-made, a '*thing*' maybe found in nature or man-made; it may be a *commodity* (in an Appadurian sense [i]) or it may be *fetishised*; as long as there is the element of a subject/object dialogic.

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[i] Arjun Appadurai is a social-cultural anthropologist and theorist who ascribes to a Marxist discourse on consumerism. Appadurai is of the opinion that the value of a commodity is intrinsic to the socio-cultural context that surrounds it. It is this context and relationship that also allows a thing to move in and out of its commodity state.

A *thing* would, by this understanding, be an object that in addition to its materiality is codified and given a meaning that is additional to its materiality. However, *'thingness'* or 'objectification' depends largely on its context: As Kopytoff alluded, its value (monetary or otherwise) is determined by society. Ben Highmore borrows from Pablo Neruda's idea of "a human atmosphere that inundates things from outside and from inside" arguing that a thing may assert it's own atmosphere from the inside, out; while a human may assert it's atmosphere on the thing from the outside, in (Highmore, p. 59); through this symbiotic relationship, the human and the *thing* share "memories, anecdotes and remembrances" (Highmore, p.66), without which, the *thing* would be merely an object. Arjun Appadurai similarly theorizes that a thing devoid of monetary worth may still hold a significance that is etched into its form, usages and the journey it has been on (Appadurai, 1994, p. 77).

Applied to Brown's *'Thing Theory'*, it would be these intangible inscriptions that are codified and are overlaid onto the materiality of an object, so that together they can be read as a *thing*. While she often uses the word 'Object' where Brown, Highmore, Kopytoff and Miller may use 'Thing'; Turkle, in her book *'Evocative Objects'*, acquiesces that beyond materiality, "objects bring together thought and feeling". She brings together narratives of people and their *'evocative objects'* and carefully juxtaposes them with quotes from theorists dealing with material culture, either directly or through some association. She doesn't pass judgment or adopt any particular lens, but presents the reader with a smorgasbord of ideas on the subject. Her explanation of an 'Evocative Object' is explained in the title – "Things we think with". *'Evocative Objects'* presents each narrative as a portrait, which can be viewed collectively, or analysed individually. This curatorial manner, seems to be an increasingly popular approach: Miller presents his book "The Comfort of Things" as a series of vignettes of the lives (and things) of ordinary people living on a particular street in London; researchers/editors Rob Walker and Joshua Glenn in their 'literary and economic experiment' (and subsequent publication) 'Significant Objects: 100 Extraordinary Stories About Ordinary Things' present their findings in a similar manner, but the idea of curating stories of people and their *objects* was carried out quite literally by the Portland Art Museum for their exploratory initiative, 'Object Stories', which presents the relationships that people have with their things. The following description is from their website:

> Drawing from material culture, thing theory, anthropology, Museum education, and
> traditions of storytelling, Object Stories, the Portland Art Museum's new installation,

is an open-ended exploration of the relationship between people and things, the

Museum and the community, and the subjective and objective.

Object stories built a complex system around a simple premise and though I have discussed this in detail through a case study in Appendix 1, I would like to point out that 'Object Stories' is somewhat reminiscent of De Certeau's assertion that "where stories … are reduced to museographical objects, there is a loss of space" as well as Brown's statement of how the removal of a *thing* from its context contributes to a similar loss of dynamism, and renders the animated *thing* into a passive *object*. In contrast, the objective of *Talking Things* is not to extract a *thing* from it's environment; nor imbue a story with a value that renders it unapproachable- on the contrary, by asking participants to bring along something that reminds them of *home* and then to think about its story, I am evoking a dialogic exchange that opens up the space between an *object* and a *thing*: that is the layers of meaning and codification, the connections, the relationships, the emotions that allow us to go beyond the materiality of the 'Object' and into the amorphousness that makes it a *thing*.

Home: The Everyday

A Home shares the same relationship to a House that a *thing* shares with an 'Object'. More than just a dwelling, a 'Home' encompasses memories, emotions, relationships and connections in addition to its physicality. The act of choosing an object for this workshop is significant since it deliberately makes the participant access these connections prior to the workshop, which sets the tone for the dialogue that will follow.

Home is also what is familiar. Highmore posits the tenuous balance between the familiar and the mundane as the 'everyday': by taking an object out of its familiar surroundings, the routine (that could lead to ennui) is disrupted, leaving a space in which the subject/*object* becomes apparent allowing us to accept what is unique within the ordinary. Quoting Paulo Neruda, Highmore speaks of observing a familiar object at rest to appreciate its meaning and capacity (Highmore, 2011, p. 60), yet he warns of the 'spectacular' and the 'exotic' that is often recognized in the 'everyday life' of another. *Talking Things* does not aim to exoticise people's things or their lives, but through the act of talking about an object that is reminiscent of *home*, allows the participant to recognize "the exceptional (that is to be) found at the heart of the everyday" (Highmore, 2002, p. 3); adding another level to Paulo Freire's description of dialogue being "an act where humans meet to reflect on their reality, as they make and remake it".

Chapter 8
Design Activism

Through the discourse of this thesis, it is obvious that the role of the designer goes beyond the studio and can lend its expertise to a range of different domains. Indeed the list of nascent design disciplines is so exhaustive and the distinctions between each, so blurry that it almost seems like a futile exercise to create a taxonomy of them: This landscape of collaborative design has been described in detail by Dykes et al. in their article 'Towards a new disciplinary framework for contemporary creative design practice', which attempts to assimilate work under the umbrellas of multi-, cross-, trans- or inter-disciplinary. In this spirit of reciprocity where design lends itself to other disciplines, it also absorbs from them: As we have seen, systems thinking is one such instance.

Donella Meadows defines a system as "an interconnected set of elements that is currently organized in a way that achieves something" she further clarifies this by stating that "more than the sum of its parts...a system may exhibit adaptive, dynamic, goal-seeking, self-preserving and sometimes evolutionary behaviour". (Meadows, 12).

Italian design strategist Ezio Manzini paints a scenario of what he calls 'a *Cosmopolitan Localism*'. He talks about "being rooted" in a place and a community, while being open to "ideas, information, people, things". Manzini points to sustainable community models built on developing the five resources present in most communities, one of which he calls 'social resources' referring to "the existence of strong local communities" or in Putnam's terms, *social capital.*
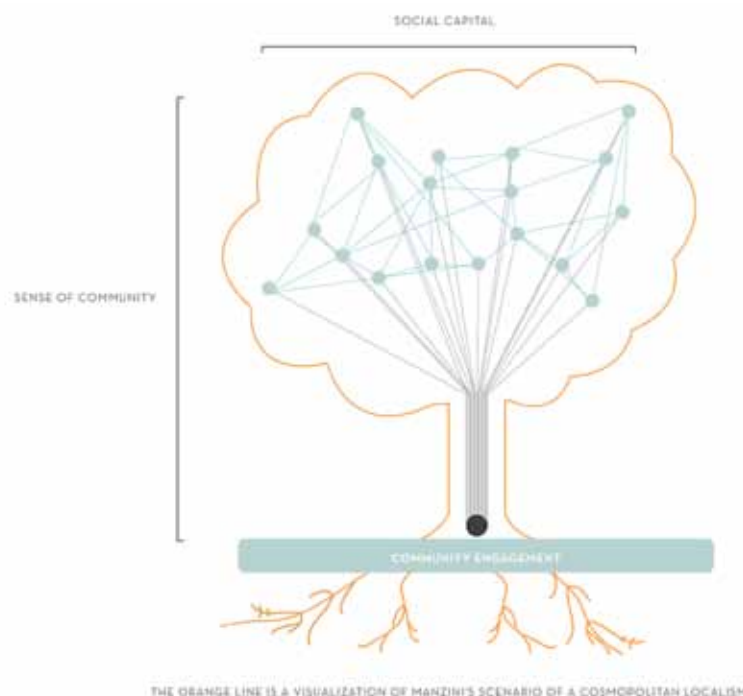

Figure 8.1
*Community
Engagement and
a Cosmopolitan
Localism*
Zara N. Contractor

THE ORANGE LINE IS A VISUALIZATION OF MANZINI'S SCENARIO OF A COSMOPOLITAN LOCALISM

Manzini states that though these resources exist, they need to be "discovered, enhanced and adequately developed". (Manzini, 2008, p. 450).

Manzini also builds the case for small-scale change that begins at a community/neighbourhood level. I was fortunate to hear him speak at the University of British Columbia last year, where he described a "global network of locals" in a scenario dubbed 'SLOC: Small, Local, Open, Connected. Like a Cosmopolitan Localism, SLOC describes the merits of small-scale, community-based projects that form nodes within a larger system, in order for them to be sustainable in the long term.

But why is design so well suited to community engagement? Graphic designer Janice Kirkpatrick states that "Designers are well equipped to manage cultural strategies because of the sensorial language of symbols, signs, myths and values they employ" (Kirkpatrick, 1994, p.79). Designers, with our dual role of encoding and decoding what surrounds us, from the visual vernacular to the 'ideology' or patterns within a system are perfectly situated to take on challenges that arise within communities. It is these aspects of design and not solely technical expertise that designers must rely on when working with communities. In fact John Thackara explicitly downplays the role of technology in creating community saying that a far greater contribution to building a *sense of community.* is made by the "emergence of shared meaning as we interact with each other in meaningful activities".

Talking Things, pulls from Manzini and Thackara's work by bridging social capital and building a sense of community amongst small to medium-sized groups of individuals. By way of evoking fewer but deeper dialogues, the stage is set for 'meaningful activities' that point towards areas of mutual interest and future collaborations between participants.

Margaret Wheatley, champions this mindset which designers Jamer Hunt and Liz Sanders are proponents of as well. Hunt points to the shift in paradigm towards collaborative learning, which garners diverse perspectives and uses them in solving *wicked problems*. He posits this type of learning as the bedrock for future innovation and discovery. This line of thought goes hand in hand with the notions of dialogic learning put forward by Freire; yet it is Friere's idea of *conscientization* which links community engagement most closely to design, and as we have seen in fact, Sangiorgi points to "consciousness-raising or *conscientization* as the central concept of community action research. It is intended as a self-reflection and awareness process that leads from seeing oneself as an object responding to a given system to a subject that can question and transform the system itself" (qtd. in Sangiogi, 2011).

Emily Pilloton expands on the socially responsible role of designing in a community by stating that 'design must not just inspire action and reaction; it must amplify impact. It must be iterative for multiple scalable applications, so it can be used repeatedly as a resource for change' (Pilloton, 2009). *Talking Things* is intentionally designed for small-scale application with up to 15 participants at a time, so that its focus is qualitative and not quantitative; however, it is structured in a way that the various activities may be repeated with different sets of people and in different capacities, incrementally involving more people in the project as a whole. The facilitator's guide, as mentioned before, contains ideas of how to scale the project to engage a wider set of people but engaging various members of the community at different stages of the process: community members with the required skills may be approached or commissioned to digitally record the sessions and display the results online and off-line. Local institutions could be approached to host a related event and artists (in all capacities, from music to performance, digital media to written and spoken-word artists) could be approached to create works based on the stories shared. Creating "multiple scalable options" in this way allows the project to be used despite having limited resources and yet be scaled up if time, money and other resources are available.

Talking Things also satisfies the 6 criteria laid out in 'A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers will Rule the Future'. Author and journalist, Daniel Pink outlines the 6 senses necessary for success in what he terms 'the Conceptual Age'. The first 'sense' is *Design*; Pink explains how things or services must move beyond functionality and emotionally engage users (with the rise of user-experience design and user-centered design, this is a key component of a contemporary design practice). The second sense is Story-again, emotionally engaging material that gives depth to information and data. *Symphony,* the third sense focuses on synthesis: pulling disparate pieces of information together and seeing 'the big picture' allows us to consider a more holistic approach to a problem (the corner-stone of systems thinking).

The fourth sense, *Empathy,* is a counterpoint to logic and allows us to truly connect to each other and understand what is needed to progress. *Play* is not a frivolous fifth sense: it encourages creativity, it allows for respite and above all it is a conduit for joy. By virtue of using unconventional approaches to serious problems, play encourages genuine engagement and a willingness to be part of a solution. The last sense is *Meaning*: Fulfilment that doesn't come from material wealth, but from participating in something with a higher purpose. It is through these 6 senses that *Talking Things* inspires change.

An important point to note here is that the change that is brought about is incremental by nature. It is the first step towards building social capital and a sense of community: It initiates a purposeful dialogue.

Conclusion

For any student of the Karachi Grammar School, winter is heralded by the annual school play. In December 1996, with a cast and choir of over 500 students between the ages of 9 and 12, we performed a unique version of Roger and Hammerstein's 'The King and I'. Each year, rehearsing for the play is a ritual carried out every morning for over 3 months, during which repetition ingrains each word of the musical into our memories. Through this we learned more than just the script. While I am certain that at that age we weren't fully able to grasp the complexity of the underlying themes of the play, including migration and cultural differences and the dichotomies of tradition and change; we were left with an understanding of how each one of us played a role in the performance and that our participation, no matter how small, was significant. Moreover even if we weren't able to articulate it at the time, we understood the power of being part of a collective experience.

The *Talking Things* workshop was not as large in size; neither in terms of the number of participants, nor duration, but what it did create was a profound collective experience for the people that were involved. Using Manzini's *SLOC* approach something shifted within this small sampling of people: Those involved felt as if they belonged to a group and that each of their experiences were valued. They created an experience together and established a sense of community amongst themselves despite their differences. By focussing on behaviour change in smaller pockets of people, *Talking Things* sparked the dialogue on creating stronger communities within the community members themselves, so that they are empowered to think of creative ways in which to engage with each other. I have no doubt that in this way it is an entry point. Turchi observes that "a blank page is only a beginning and not the beginning: In the same way *Talking Things* is one way in which to approach the idea of building social capital and establishing a sense of community in urban neighbourhoods. These are not tasks that can be fully established during the course of 3 hours. They are a mammoth undertaking that requires a sustained effort. As with all wicked problems, the complexity comes from the various stakeholders involved and the idea that there is no singular definitive solution, but a series of incremental, iterative process that work collectively to address the issue. In the case of *Talking Things*, it is one designer's contribution to a far greater discussion on the role that *Transformation Design* can play in community engagement; offering a methodology that has been influenced by anthropology, ethnography, social sciences and narrative theory.

In as much as this was a journey of exploring new territories in my praxis; it was also about rediscovering my journey. I introduced this thesis with Michel DeCerteau's observation that a narrative

is composed of footsteps and movements as much as it is composed of words. Punctuated with memories, the story of *Talking Things* for me became a dance between retracing old footsteps and creating new ones. In many ways the intricacy of this 'dance' came through the realisation that the same motifs were woven through each test of Talking Things. In each iteration of the workshop there were the recurring themes of love and loss; migration and adaptation; relationships and experiences. There was an overwhelming acknowledgement of the universality of our experiences. Participant, designer or observer, we each experienced a sense that we were not dancing alone: that for each of us the steps may have been different, but that we were all dancing to the same tune.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Events & Workshops

CREATIVE RESEARCH

LEARNING

① CATEGORIES:

Q → A → USE
v/s
Q → A → EFFECT

③ OBJECTIVES

- SUBSTANSIVE LEARNING OBJECTIVE: LEARN HOW ST CAN BC IN JN USING OBJECTS
- PROCESSUAL SKILLS + CONCEPTS: BRINGING PPL TOG THROUGH ST ACTIVITIES FACILITATED BY DESIG
- METHODOLOGICAL SKILLS + PRO FOCUS GROUPS – FEEDBACK O THRU INTERVIEWS +

- SELF K
IMP. CO
UID
THR

② GOOD RESEARCH TOPIC:

INTEREST → SHARING
↓ ↘ → UNDERSTANDING
BELONGING
MMUNITY

- AVAILABLE KNOWLEDGE
↓
VAN. FND.
+
LIT REVIEW

TORIES TH
OBJECTS BUILD
A SENSE OF COMMUNITY
AMONGST PEOPLE IN
URBAN NEIGHBOURHOODS
↓
HOW CAN COMM D.
FACILITATE THE
EXCHANGE

OVERVIEW

By the end of the Spring semester I had defined my project space as the intersection of story-telling, community building and communication design. The summer was an opportunity to familiarize myself with this space and gain a deeper understanding of it through first, second and third hand research. I wanted to see what precedents have been set for the type of research that I am doing and in each of these fields.

In addition to this I set out to explore the periphery of the project space, by using observations from some activities that were directly related and some that weren't, and applying them to my thesis project.

I wanted to address the idea of community by analyzing different aspects of it, both in a virtual (on-line) and a real-world (off-line) setting. I also wanted to use the summer to get acquainted with and learn from the design community in Vancouver.

Overall, my internship was a self-directed study that can be divided into three parts:

    Workshops, conferences and events
    chART Public Art Marpole
    Thesis project progress

WORKSHOPS, CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

Sustainability

Participatory Planning

Social Media

Design & Creativity

The first workshop I attended was called Sustainability on Campus at Emily Carr University. Though I was attending primarily to transcribe the discussions taking place at the workshop, I was able to observe how the workshop was designed to tackle an issue with multiple layers of complexity, through a series of well-structured activities. This included a step-by-step process:
Introducing the issue
Identifying precedents
Mapping the precedents out by overlaying a pre-existing rating system
Break-out groups for brainstorming
Summarizing
Classifying and prioritizing

This process will act as a guide for the focus groups that I will be conducting in the Fall for my thesis project.
This workshop also reiterated the key themes of community engagement and acknowledging the importance of social capital, in this case vis-a-vis the culturally diverse student body at the University.

The second workshop was held at the Simon Fraser University campus downtown.
This was a Participatory Planning workshop conducted by Dr Leonora Angeles and organized by CEP Vancouver. This was a full-day workshop that spoke about community building by engaging the residents. It spoke about engaging communities to unlock the knowledge that the residents hold and the importance of communication in this process. Through the course of the day we discussed:
Types of goal-setting exercises
Matching resources available to the goals set
Trust-building

Seeking out hard-to-reach target groups
The role and importance of communication when dealing with diversity
Empowering a community
Knowledge/skill transferring/capacity building

These topics relate directly to my thesis and pointed out integral points to consider such as trust building and the role of communication when working with different communities. We worked with charettes as a method for quick ideation (much as we have done in the studio) and storytelling as a way to communicate and foster empathy. Broadly speaking these were all tools that I had been using during the Fall and Spring semesters, but in this case the shift in context allowed me to understand how to use these tools when addressing people that are not necessarily from creative disciplines.

In May I had the opportunity to do some graphic recording for a keynote speech at Social HR Camp, Vancouver. While this sharpened my rapid sketching skills it also helped me form connections to people working closely with social media. Through the social HR camp I was approached later in the summer, to be part of a series called 45 conversations where I spoke about the role of social media in my life, but also about community building on and off-line. I also spoke briefly about the Marpole-Stories of Home project that I had conducted in July.
Through these two experiences I began to delve into the possibility of housing some of the content from my thesis project in an online space that would allow those who participated in my project the option to continue to interact with each other and expand on the conversations that had been initiated during the project.

During the summer I also attended the POGO Portfolio workshop by the Graphic Designers of Canada, B.C Chapter, gaining constructive criticism about my portfolio from industry pro-

fessionals. This workshop opened up the opportunity to speak to those working within design, about the relationship between community building and design.
In this capacity, I spoke to Marga Lopez (of Bare Advertising) and Kara Pecknold (ECU Alumni) about the unifying role that design plays in fostering a sense of community and what it means to design for groups from different cultures.
Lopez spoke in detail about how the language of design could either speak to a niche or to a population in general; either way, it can be inclusive to a certain degree, but it cannot reach everyone. She spoke to creating a community around a common goal or interest.
She also spoke to how environmental factors impact a sense of community, as do social norms within different cultures.
Kara Pecknold spoke to finding what drives a certain group to be engaged in an activity. How food acts as a communifying agent.
Pecknold pointed to the methodologies she employed while bringing a group of people together to discuss design issues (Dinner with a Side of Design).
She spoke of simple methods such as the 'dot voting system' which get people to participate in design decisions and speaking to people in a language that they understand.

Later on in the summer I also volunteered with the GDC for their summer get-together and attended a talk hosted by them with
Sandy Garrassino, where she spoke about the role of creativity in civic culture.
Garrassino's talk was short, but touched upon how humans are inherently gravitating towards creativity as a means of expression and solution-finding. She went through a brief history of creative expression and the manner in which art and design are used to communicate across cultures and generations by playing on human emotions.

chART: PUBLIC ART MARPOLE

chART PUBLIC ART MARPOLE

In Spring 2012 I was commissioned to conduct an activity as part of chART: Public Art Marpole. Project, called Marpole, Stories of Home was a cross-cultural, inter-generational activity that used objects as vehicles for storytelling. Participants (children between the ages of 4 and 12) were requested to bring an object that reminded them of 'Home', which would be cast using florist foam and plaster of Paris. While the objects dried, the participants were asked to share stories about the objects and what personal connections they held. These were done verbally as well as in written form on 4" x 7" cards that were specifically designed for the project.

The finished artifacts have been housed at the Vancouver Public Library, Marpole Branch where they will remain for a month.

The phases of the project and what I learned from them are outlined below:

Advertising and social media

A week before the first workshop, I posted A4-sized flyers at cafes and shops on Granville street between 63rd & 71st avenue as well as the Vancouver Public Library, Marpole Branch, where an A3 sized poster was placed in the window.

Postings on social media were done after the first workshop was conducted on the 7th of July, and were done by chART Marpole and the Marpole BIA.

While the poster was eye-catching, parts of the body copy were not clear and we received feedback that dates were not prominent enough. Moreover, a more strategic approach of introducing the project to individual groups within the community, as well as applying some of the strategies learned during the CEP Participatory Planning workshop might have improved the overall turnout. In terms of advertising on social media sites, specific tools for buzz-building could be explored in the future, to lead up to the event, particularly with the target audience (19-30 year olds) that I will be approaching for my thesis project.

The process

The process remained the same each week, with the participants gathering around one large table to cast their objects and to talk about them. A similar set-up had been used during the storytelling workshop that I had conducted on campus during the spring semester as part of Marten Sims' exhibition 'Sea Inside'.

Midway through the activity (after the stories were shared) a light lunch was offered to the participants. This was provided by the Marpole Oakridge Family Place. I observed how care was taken not to mix different food groups and to keep the food as simple as possible, so that those with dietary concerns could exclude whichever food group did not suit them. Having food at the event served a dual purpose: it allowed for a break and refreshment, but also was a chance for the adults present to interact with each other and start up conversations.

However, though these conversations were initiated, they may not have been enough to sustain deep and meaningful friendships; a concern that I will be addressing in my thesis project.

It was also interesting to note how different people shared their stories. Some were more comfortable expressing themselves verbally, while others preferred to write their thoughts out. Some even drew on the cards.

The objects themselves allowed people to open up about themselves; acting as a launching pad for different discussions about home. In only one case was the child embarrassed to talk about his object, that his mother had picked out for him, but he chose to write about it instead.

In another case, the child was encouraged to speak after she found that another person had a similar object. She used the two as props to start a conversation with each other and shared her story through their conversation.

For one family, English was not their first language, however orally engaging the participants was easier as gestures could be used to convey meaning, whereas their cards did not reflect the stories that had be shared orally.

Connecting Marpole Day

Before being displayed at the Vancouver Public Library, the artefacts and the written stories were displayed on a table at Connecting Marpole Day. This gave members of the Marpole community the opportunity to see and read the stories and view the artefacts. Several people connected to the objects and in a couple of cases shared their stories with similar objects. Others were curious about some of the objects which either had to be explained because they were unfamiliar or in some case indistinguishable. In the majority of the cases though, the written story supported the artefact.

Overall, this project came with a steep learning curve. It spoke to how people who have lived in Vancouver for even up to 15 years, still refer to the country of their origin as Home, or how people share stories, how simple interventions in an environment (such as having one long table rather than separate ones) bring people together, how a break for food encourages people to converse more freely with each other. It also brought up areas that need to be addressed for my thesis project, such as how to alter an activity so that conversations can be sustained over a longer period of time. Above all, the value of a shared, creative experience and the evocative power of objects stood out.
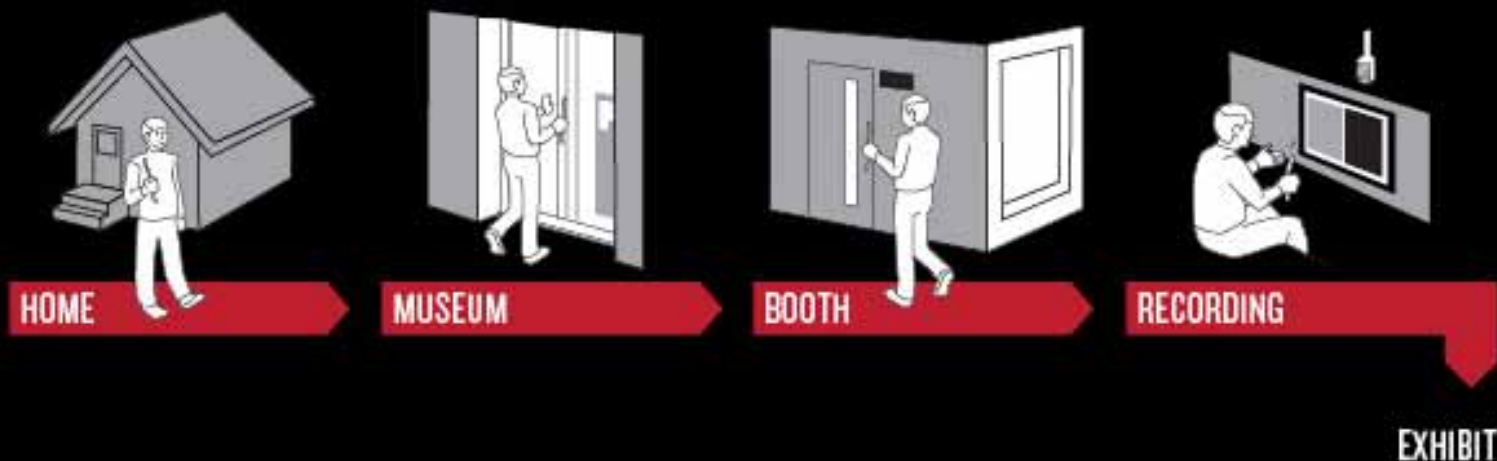
photocredits: Adam Stenhouse, GDC-BC, CMVan

Appendix 2

Object Stories-Precedent Research

Object Stories is an ongoing a project and subsequent exhibition conducted by the Portland Art Museum. Through it, participants are invited to bring an object that is meaningful to them to the museum and then record the story of the object in a specially constructed recording booth.
The participants are given a series of prompts that help them tell their story. Then are asked to pose for photographs with their object and select 6 keywords for their story.
The resulting stories are displayed online and can be accessed through a touch-screen display in the museum as well. Some of the stories are printed on cards and displayed within the museum as well.

Components

Off-line
Onsite there was an exhibition that included a recording booth and an digital archive.
There was also an event conducted onsite to launch the project.
Offsite there were workshops for writing and film-making that were conducted in collaboration with an NGO and members of the Latin American community in Portland.

On-line

This was in the form of a website that included information about the project; a registration section that allowed participants to book the recording studio along with the prompts that allow the participants to formulate the story; and an archive that contains over 8000 stories of the participants objects.

THE SHAPE OF JAZZ TO COME.

Matthew DiTullo

Strengths

The effective demonstration of the power of an object to draw out a personal narrative.

Establishing shared experiences and connections with strangers through personal narratives

The language is approachable, friendly and easy to comprehend

The design is democratic in that it is the same for anyone and everyone who participates

User-friendly interface and simple, dynamic layout

Weaknesses

People may be intimidated by the idea of an art museum

The $15 fee may be a barrier to entry

There is no option for the participants to exclude themselves from the photographs or to write their story and not recite it orally

The visual language may be too overbearing and not approachable

The prompts used were considered too didactic by some participants who wanted more control over their own stories

There are no sustained connections formed between people

There is a risk that the novelty will wear off